

HALES, PATRICK DEAN, Ph.D. Using Participatory Action Research to Approach Teacher Professional Development: An Analysis of Teacher Talk in a Writing Professional Learning Community. (2016)
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Most teachers take part in professional development of some kind at some point in their careers. As a result, that professional development should support the development of instruction. Many teachers report that professional development neither supports their practice nor improves results. Thus, more work needs to be done on how professional development can meet those needs and what helps to support effective professional learning. In this study, a group of educators created a professional learning community using concepts from participatory action research to support their interactions and focus their work on achieving their goals. The purpose of this learning community was to discuss and improve writing instruction practices as teachers had noted that as a particular need within the school. Toward a better understanding of the functions of a professional learning community, this study focused on the language used by teachers in order to construct knowledge about writing instruction. To this end, the use of case study methods and discourse analysis provided a vehicle to tell the story of this learning community through the teacher talk that took place.

The data analysis developed across three phases. In the first phase, general themes from the talk and how it helped or hindered participants from constructing knowledge emerged. These themes were called modes of intercommunication. The second phase deepened the understanding of the language as the modes were subdivided into certain features based upon the purposes of teacher talk and how they aided or did not aid in

constructing knowledge about writing instruction. The last phase included an analysis of survey data as it revealed educator perspectives of professional learning and changes in the learning community across all the meeting. This was held against changes that occurred in the teacher talk to better understand how the language use in the learning community changed. Findings from these three phases indicate that teacher professional learning can be supported through frameworks that promote teacher talk that is consistent, challenging, and action-oriented.

Keywords: Teacher professional learning, participatory action research, discourse analysis, writing instruction

USING PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH TO APPROACH TEACHER
PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: AN ANALYSIS OF TEACHER TALK
IN A WRITING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

by

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For Tiffany.

She knows.

APPROVAL PAGE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The past school year has been filled with a monthly ritual of taking part in a professional learning community on writing at a school where I was once a secondary English teacher. Much of the staff and all of the students have changed since my time there, yet I still find myself drawn back time and again to that social studies classroom at least one afternoon a month. This learning community began as part of my pilot study for this proposed dissertation and was born of a need described by the teachers and administrator at this school for a way to improve writing instruction through collaboration across content areas. What happened was the birth of a community of professionals with learning in mind. Through the use of participatory action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; McIntyre, 2008), this group of educators came together to take action to improve their writing instruction through creating their own professional learning opportunities. Instead of scripted, one-size-fits-all professional development, these educators held conversations, shared practice, and negotiated ways to challenge one another toward becoming better teachers. I know I go back for the engaging discussion, opportunity to share, and positive atmosphere focused on making a better education experience, but I think Angela (pseudonym), a participant in the pilot study, said it best when she reminded me, “I always know I’m going to come in here and know more when I leave. I look forward to it, and I’ve never said that about another professional

development.” This dissertation research builds upon that pilot study with some of the same teachers taking part in an expanded iteration of that first learning community.

The purpose of the research is to illustrate how educators used talk to construct knowledge about writing instruction in a participatory action research professional learning community (PAR PLC). Findings from the study suggest that educators benefitted from the ability to discuss instruction in an action-oriented way in an environment that promoted sharing, questioning and challenging of ideas.

Learning is a continuous process for the professional. This is an especially true statement for teachers (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, 1998; Desimone, 2009, 2011; Schlanger & Fusco, 2003; Webster-Wright, 2009), though professional learning in teaching is often trite and formulaic to the extent that practitioners are unlikely to engage or participate in the process (Darling-Hammond, Wei, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008; Watson, 2014). This is particularly true for secondary teachers where even though nine out of ten teachers take part in professional development annually (OECD, 2014), the organization, purposes, and expectations of secondary schooling drag reform and have not traditionally promoted true professional learning (Little, 2002). Additionally, there is a substantive lack of research on effective professional development in secondary education (Barr et al., 2015; Borko, 2004). Thus, it stands to reason that more research needs to be done in order to understand how professional learning can be better utilized to become an important part of teacher professional practice.

In 2004, the Teaching Commission released *Teaching at Risk: A Call to Action* which called on professional development to address issues of necessary school reform through alignment with state and district goals as well as site-level collaboration amongst teachers. Today, there is evidence that, despite extensive research which highlights core tenets of effective professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009; Schlanger & Fusco, 2003; Stillman, 2011), the public education system is still falling far short of such goals for professional learning (Center on Education Policy, 2013; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Many teachers report their professional development experiences as weakly aligned and formulaic, poorly organized, sporadic, and un-engaging (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; OECD, 2013; Vescio et al., 2008; Watson, 2014). This is particularly troubling given that public education and teachers are under increasing scrutiny from the public, media, and policy makers to improve instruction for students.

The question of professional development, or professional learning, in education for the future will not be the amount that is offered, which has been at the forefront in the past, but rather the effectiveness of implementation. I say that professional development is a question in education because a question implies something that *might be* rather than what is reality. “Professional development” is an elusive term, but to get at the reality, take the deconstruction of the words “professional” and “development.” The term “professional” suggests a certain level of rigor and collegial focus. However, the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) for 2013, a survey of thousands of teachers and school leaders across thirty-four countries including the United States, found

that one in three teachers felt the teaching profession is undervalued. Additionally, most teachers reported receiving feedback, appraisals, and development of their teaching, but half of these teachers said they felt these components did not impact their practice or were just mandatory exercises. This does not boast professionalism. The nominal term of the pair, “development,” promises change and progress. In the U.S., about 90 percent of teachers take part in professional development and echo the sentiment of impracticality from TALIS 2013 (OECD, 2014). This is because most professional development takes place in the one-time, motivational speaker-style, workshop setting which does not promote long-term instructional improvement (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond, Andree, Wei, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009; Desimone, 2009; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). One study of 1,300 professional development studies found that programs persisting for less than fourteen hours had little effect on instruction and no effect on student achievement (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007). Teacher mastery of a new skill such that it will impact teaching and improve student achievement takes time and effort, the value and amount of which is still studied and speculated to be as much as fifty hours of practice (French, 1997) or twenty separate repeated exercises (Joyce & Showers, 2002). With these understandings, it can be said of professional development in education that the reality is counter to its literal definition; in other words, it is achieving neither professionalism nor teacher development.

Professional learning in education is far from ubiquitous. First of all, the very term lacks a solid foundation. By “professional learning,” do we mean educating teachers or all school staff, on-site or outsourcing, prescriptive or generalized? Is it the same as or

different from professional development? Why when many teachers experience “professional learning” does it mean informative sessions on policy changes in the school system rather than instructional content and pedagogy? Dufour (2004) argued that it is rather that the concept of professional learning has become too ubiquitous, so much so that it risks losing meaning and definition. Efforts to recapture the term require, as Watson (2014, p. 27) pens, for schools a “destablising of the rigidities with which the school as an institution surrounds itself.” Most teachers report taking part in some form of professional development/learning, typically in traditional lecture or workshop format, but the majority of that majority do not find them useful but rather use them to fill district or state requirements (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009, Gulamhussein, 2013). Research suggests this is due to several key issues with professional learning in U.S. public schools including 1) infrequency and lack of continuous opportunities to practice learned strategies for instruction (Joyce & Showers, 2002, Yoon et al., 2007), 2) resistance or trouble with implementation after leaving the professional learning (Desimone et al., 2009, Ermeling, 2010, Fuller 2001), and 3) a general lack of professionalism and focus on teachers as researchers and innovators (Little, 2002).

Thus, what might professional development be? Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) grant the following advice,

Enabling educational systems to achieve on a wide scale the kind of teaching that has a substantial impact on student learning requires much more intensive and effective professional learning than has traditionally been available. If we want all young people to possess the higher-order thinking skills they need to succeed in the 21st century, we need educators who possess higher-order teaching skills and deep content knowledge. (p. 2)

The impetus of this statement, and the extensive body of research on teacher professional learning, reads as a rallying cry for public education to evolve its traditional stances, policies, and practices. More understanding of how to transform professional learning into meaningful experiences for teachers is needed.

The literature also suggests this is especially true with regards to the teaching of writing as it is a content area that has benefitted from research on professional learning best practices (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Bifuh-Ambe, 2013; Stokes, 2011; Wood & Lieberman, 2000). Teachers tend to implement new skills and instructional strategies with more fidelity and confidence when they are received in peer-coaching situations (Joyce & Showers, 2013). Wood and Lieberman (2000) found that not only did collaborations amongst teachers about writing instruction make participants better writers, but it also made them more confident about writing as a content and the teaching of writing. Thus it is suggested that with more opportunities to share and challenge ideas about writing instruction, educators could become more confident in their practices about writing. The educators in this study set out to create such an opportunity using the PAR PLC framework to talk about writing in a meaningful way.

Gulamhussein (2013), among many others in educational research, has called professional learning the “linchpin” for school reform. This perspective means that educational researchers should work with teachers in schools on effective ways to improve their practices and understand the nature of effective professional learning. The center of changing U.S. schooling is teacher efficacy to implement and innovate strategies to improve student learning; to do this, support for teachers will have to focus

on community building for sustainability of professional development and growing professionalism amongst teachers as researchers and practitioners. Multiple authors argue the advantages of professional collaboration to construct knowledge toward improved instruction (Desimone, 2011; Joyce & Showers, 2013; Mercer, 2000).

At the heart of this study is creating the opportunity to do just that. In this dissertation, I discuss this significance of professional learning as a means of change through the lens of a professional learning community focused on the teaching of writing, as the participants in this study noted a great need for more development in this area, a sentiment echoed nationwide (Applebee & Langer, 2011). In the early stages of preparing to work with the school in this study, the teachers who agreed to take part noted an interest in engaging, meaningful, action-oriented professional learning about writing. As a result, I drew heavily upon participatory action research (PAR) (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; McIntyre, 2008) in the design of the learning community. We talked about the tenets of PAR, particularly the impetus for action and shared the nature of the work done, in order to set some guiding principles and arrange the ways we held meetings. PAR made up a significant contribution in the way the learning community set and accomplished goals, and as a result, drove the language of participants in the study.

By analyzing the language used by participants in this participatory action research learning community, understandings about certain aspects of their co-construction of knowledge emerged. The modern education landscape is one where nationally teachers do not want to take part in professional learning. In this study, language analysis helps to understand ways that teachers talk while part of a professional

learning; that analysis informs the discussion about creating professional learning experiences that teachers find valuable to their practice. This dissertation research study engages a teacher professional learning community focused on writing instruction by asking the following questions:

- How do participants use language to construct knowledge (or not) about writing instruction in a participatory action research learning community on writing?
- How does participant language use change over the course of time in this learning community about writing?

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

This study explores how secondary school teachers use talk to construct knowledge about teaching writing in a participatory action research professional learning community. Participatory action research (PAR) served as a framework for engaging with participants and transforming the learning community. Participatory action research helps to dissolve the power structures inherent in learning communities by assigning equitable contribution to members and motivating goal-orientation and transformation (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Participatory action research would seem to be an ideal marriage with teacher professional learning given what is known about effective learning communities. As a result, the professional learning community in this study was developed in cooperation with the participants using participatory action research as a model. In order to address teacher language with these PAR PLC meetings, I employed discourse analysis to help understand the ways participants constructed knowledge about writing through talk. The framework for language analysis in this study draws upon sources of literature concerning discourse analysis; specifically, this research takes into account Mercer's (2000) categories of talk. In this way, discourse analysis considers the unique sociocultural context which is significant in participatory action research. In the following section, first I will describe participatory action research, its benefits and

challenges, and its connection to professional learning with regard to this study. Next, I will describe discourse analysis and how it can be used to analyze teacher talk toward an understanding of how knowledge construction takes place in professional learning communities.

What Is Participatory Action Research?

Originally stemming from the work of Lewin (1946) with action research and expanding over decades of study and use, participatory action research is an epistemological stance not framed by a concrete set of methods and processes but rather engaged in a pluralistic orientation of ideals and change (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McIntyre, 2008; Sluys, 2010; Wadsworth, 1998; Whyte, 1991). The three basic tenets of PAR are participation in life and society, action through engagement with concepts and conversations, and research on knowledge and processes which lead to learning (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Participatory action research necessitates individuals coming together as co-researchers to inquire into and address through research and action processes, issues, and opportunities which are of significance to the participants (McTaggart, 1997; Reason & Bradbury, 2008). Participatory action research holds consistent to the expectation that research is done with participants and not on them, urging researchers to create opportunities for participants to become co-researchers (Locke, Alcorn, & O'Neill, 2013; Rahman, 2008; Reason & Bradbury, 2008; Whyte, 1991). In education, PAR draws heavily from the perspectives of Freire (1970, 1982) in its significance on opening opportunities of voice to “silenced,” marginalized populations via the power of inquiry and release of illusory authority. The meeting of

participation, action, and research in this orientation concerns itself with engagement, empowerment, and transformation based on the needs of a community rather than the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Freire 1982; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; McIntyre, 2003; Rahman, 2008; Whyte, 1991).

There have been multiple studies that stand to the effectiveness of PAR in educational research. In a PAR study with 15 graduate students, McIntyre (2003) found that this orientation tended to promote self- and critical-awareness as well as anti-deficit and transformative mindsets for pre-service teachers and researchers. The author noted that PAR created opportunities for community engagement and collaboration between universities and public education institutions. Participatory action research called into question the notion of the researcher as a bastion of knowledge and disintegrated perceived barriers through open dialogue. Trauth-Nare and Buck (2011) used PAR to reflect upon lesson planning with a middle grades science classroom. In collaboration with researchers and a middle grades science teacher, the researchers valued the difficulty in negotiating different perspectives and beliefs in order to create lesson plans focused on better student learning. The authors realized through PAR that it is at the convergence of differing opinions and practices that transformation of practice occurs. The study revealed that reflection often focuses only on the self and neglects reflection of group practices and the perspectives of others. Furthering this concept of PAR with reflective purposes, Ball (2009) found, through analysis within a group of teachers looking at student responses to annotated feedback, that PAR facilitated teacher awareness of capabilities to improve practice through inquiry and reflection. Additionally, the authors

felt that PAR eased the process of change. Finally, Sluys (2010) adds an account of PAR with teachers, researchers, as well as students partaking in the orientation. In this study of literacy in middle grades classrooms, the authors stated of students and teachers, “PAR experiences created a space in their school lives to try on and try out new ways of being” (p. 149). This again implies the empowering and liberating potential of PAR. As the potential creates opportunities for improving practice, questions and challenges to its implementation arise.

Challenges to Participatory Action Research

The major challenge to PAR is ethical from the perspective of a researcher. Participatory action research requires the blurring of lines between researcher and participant roles (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Locke et al., 2013; McTaggart, 1997). This calls into question the “ownership” of the research as well as the question of bias in including the researcher as a participant in the research (Ball, 2009; Locke et al. 2013). Participatory action research also makes the anonymity in reporting of findings by the researcher difficult due to this concept of “owning” the research and participation in the study itself. It is important to a PAR perspective that a researcher not enter into the study with preconceived notions of “fixing” an aspect of practice “for” participants (Kemmis, 2006; McTaggart, 1997) but rather collaborating within community contexts to initiate transformations (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Additionally, university ethical approval processes are not always considerate of this sort of scholarship (Locke et al., 2013). A consideration of the unique aims of PAR as well as a collaborative effort by research participants at the outset of a study is necessary to address these ethical concerns.

Beyond potential ethical dilemmas, merely encouraging people to participate in participatory action research can be a dilemma (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008; McIntyre, 2003; Rahman, 2008; Sluys, 2010; Whyte, 1991). Due to the tenets of PAR that require participants to release illusory power structures and engage in potentially perspective-challenging discourse, many teachers and researchers would rather maintain the status-quo instead of transforming practice because change is difficult. A better understanding of PAR amongst teachers and more immersive opportunities for practitioners to partake in PAR are required to alleviate this tension and realize the potential of PAR to improve practice. Additionally, it may be necessary to better orient PAR into a model that can be more easily drawn upon by teachers, students, administrators, community members, and researchers seeking to make school improvements.

Participatory Action Research as a Professional Learning Community

A teacher professional learning community (PLC) is where teachers come together to learn toward improving practice in a collaborative way that shares knowledge and anticipates outcomes (DuFour, 2004). Frameworks for PLCs often cite Lave and Wenger (1991), which famously proposed “communities of practice” and “situated learning,” concepts central to the idea that professionals form communities and that those could be harnessed to improve professional knowledge. Professional learning communities have become a commonality amongst U.S. public schools, but as previously mentioned, their effectiveness has been mixed, often due to a lack of fidelity and the belief in PLCs as a panacea requiring little work other than to put professionals in a room together (Bolam et al, 2005; Grossman et al, 2001). According to several studies,

professional learning communities in education lack focus, relevance to teaching and the classroom, and the ability to create an inclusive, equitable membership for discussion rather than dissemination of information (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Pella, 2012; Watson, 2014; Vescio et al., 2008). Participatory action research could benefit from better avenues for integration and understanding within the school context and amongst educational research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Locke et al., 2013; Sluys, 2010). It is at this point that I propose a way of thinking about both PLCs and PAR as a joint venture in professional development and educational research. The use of PAR offers the creation of supportive communities and more equitable discussion through challenging power structures within communities; these characteristics address professional development needs for educators and PAR can provide a framework for professional learning.

Wenger (1998) said that learning is essential to teacher identity construction and, thus, professional learning should be a central component of teacher professional practice. To consider as a representation of this, Kraft and Papay (2014), in a study of school professional environment on teacher development, found that, despite the common misconception, teacher effectiveness is not fixed. Rather, learning, support, and environment all play a factor in a teacher's day-to-day, semester-to-semester, and annual effectiveness. This implies that a strong support group, a community, is necessary for continued teacher effectiveness. Incorporating participatory action research into teacher professional development could enrich the professional learning process by giving a more native and intrinsic opportunity to experience what we know is effective for professional development to impact instruction and improve student achievement. If we consider

professional learning communities a component of what schools call professional development, however, the presence of the core tenets of professional development alone does not reveal the effectiveness of a learning experience (Desimone, 2011). We must look to the outcomes. Learning is change; thus, the success of professional development is often contingent on change that occurs in the environment. Desimone's (2009) common model for analysis of professional development to address if positive change is occurring poses four questions, (a) does the experience express the core features of effective professional development?; (b) does teacher knowledge increase and/or is there a change in teacher attitudes and beliefs?; (c) is instruction impacted?; and (d) does student learning improve as a result? Such research would also require a certain paradigmatic perspective valuing participatory action research, and concurrently, multiple worldviews.

Participatory action research calls on communities to challenge the power structures that restrict conversations (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). As a result, that sort of work could lend itself to teacher professional learning. Research suggests that teacher thinking and practice in general lacks a necessary criticality in regards to power structures, racial and ethnic differences, and student disenfranchisement (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In order to address the sociocultural barriers inadvertently created in teaching, critical discussions must take place between educators that are focused on action and transformation. As Lisa Delpit (1995), prominent educational author, scholar, and social justice advocate, writes, "We all interpret behaviors, information, and situations through our own cultural lenses; these lenses

operate involuntarily, below the level of one's own conscious awareness, making it seem that our own view is simply the way it is" (p. 151). Thus it stands that a vehicle for creating such discussions is necessary. Participatory action research as a professional learning community addresses issues of equity between teachers and in schools through critical discourse. The participatory element of PAR requires a criticality and affirmation of the existence of multiple ways of being and knowing (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). This further supports the use of PAR to design PLC to address the needs of teacher professional learning.

Building upon Chevalier and Buckles (2013) interlocking conceptualization of participation, action-orientation, and research-bases, it is possible to place PAR within the context of a learning community. This adds to both PAR and PLC; where the implementation of PAR may have lacked a foothold via professional development or understanding within schools, PLC is a comfortable term, which provides that to PAR. Professional learning communities have suffered from a lack of true community building and no focus on transformation and responsibility for change and improvement; PAR is an orientation built upon those very tenets. The marriage of PAR and PLC in the form of participatory action research learning community makes sense in more than just placing the words beside one another; these two concepts as one complement each other and provide an opportunity for (1) teacher professional development which is transformative, reflective, and engaging and (2) educational research which is rich descriptively, action-oriented, and equitable. A focus on participatory practices in professional learning in

education could potentially increase teacher engagement as well as student outcomes of learning. The figure below explores this concept.

Attempts to design professional development and professional learning communities with participatory action research could support the growth of teacher researchers through efforts to establish a participatory action research team; this juxtaposition of identities would be necessary to allow teachers to experience opportunities for data collection and growth. A review of the literature revealed that professional development is most successful that is engaging and experiential, grounded in participant inquiry and experimentation, continuous, empowering, and enculturated. Additionally, it falls to school district personnel, school leaders, and policy makers to create opportunities for teachers to experience professional learning that both support teachers and improve instructional outcomes for students.

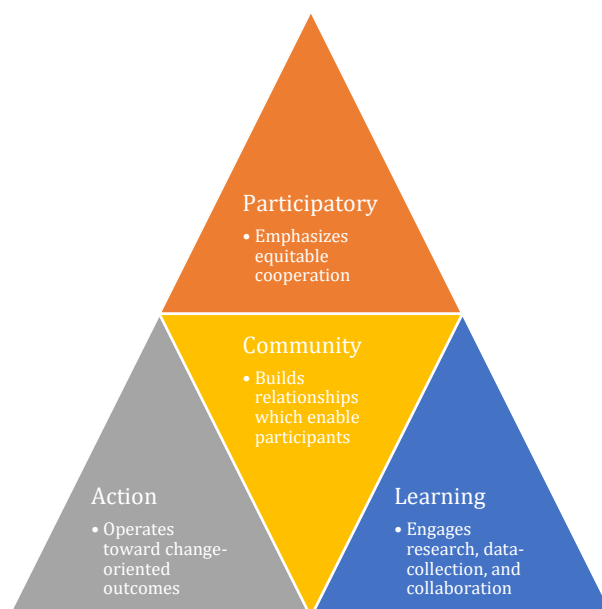


Figure 1. Participatory Action Research Learning Community Framework.

What Is Different about This Kind of Professional Learning Community?

What differentiates this from current, typical professional learning communities is the balance of engaging conversation around research in a community built upon equitable contribution and focused upon transformation of practice. It is not that this conception of PLC is built particularly for the discussion of writing instruction in high schools; rather, it is a perspective for opening dialogue such that it allows teachers through discourse,

to become Subjects of the educational process by overcoming authoritarianism and an alienating intellectualism; it also enables people to overcome their false perception of reality. The world—no longer something to be described with deceptive words—becomes the object of that transforming action by men and women which results in their humanization (Freire, 1970, p. 86).

This model uses dialogue to open opportunities for educators to be active, rather than passive, participants in their professional learning experiences. In order to more clearly explain the model into praxis, I provide a description of a PLC meeting following this process for writing instruction at the secondary level.

Participatory action research does not promote the use of protocols in the creation of action learning systems; rather, the use of general processes is encouraged (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). This means that PAR in professional learning does not seek to script, but rather to guide. As a result, a general pattern of meeting emerged in this PAR PLC on writing. The participants met in a workroom or classroom surrounded by the artifacts of school life. One participant took the lead in presenting ahead of time a potential loose agenda of topics and goals for the meeting. Before initiating, all members agreed to the

schedule and offered any additions. A participant shared to begin the meeting; this might have been research drawn from reading or experiences from practice. Either way, alongside a presentation of such information, the participant would relate how what was shared related back to the goals of the community, outlined in early meetings but ever open to debate. The ensuing discussion would focus on how the ideas fit into community goals and if they have implications individually, for the community, for the school, or in larger societal constructs. This sharing was supplemented by readings, artifacts, audio recordings, or video from a data collection process. A safe zone was created through talk as everyone ensured that across meetings all participants had an opportunity to share as well as critique, building a sense of community through the shared leadership. The participants made sure to discuss progress toward goals. A participant might have asked, “How does any of what we’re discussing move us toward the goal of ...?” The group noted how strides had or had not been made and adjusted accordingly for the next meeting. The last part of the meeting involved reflection as participants reported their thoughts on the progress of the group. This reflection may have been shared with the group in the closing minutes of the meeting or in writing, or not at all.

The PAR PLC framework stands in contrast to many professional learning communities where, literature suggests, discussion are not purposeful, challenging, or goal-oriented (Bolan, 2005; Vescio et al., 2008). Thus, the participatory and community components of the framework arise from open dialogue and shared responsibility for goals. The learning is implicit, yet purposeful, in the discussions, sharing, and reflections on practice. Last, the action component comes to light as explicit conversations about

progress toward goals. In this way, all the components work together to address the needs of the community through participation and learning.

As reflected in the process described above, this PAR PLC group utilized dialogue as its medium for learning. Thus, this study explores how educators use talk to construct knowledge about writing instruction. By learning about specific discursive strategies that foster (or not) professional learning in a PAR PLC, educators can know more about how to create and engage in professional learning that is needed to improve practice. The melding of participatory action research into the implementation of a professional learning community focused on writing instruction sets the backdrop for the theoretical framework for this dissertation. The analytical component of the theoretical framework derives from discourse analysis as it can be used to better understand the language of teachers as they talk in the learning community. PAR PLC humanizes professional learning by connecting the individuals in the group in order to support knowledge construction. Discourse analysis allows for rich descriptions of the ways that people interact through talk. In this way, discourse analysis provides the tools to explore and tell the story about the ways educators in this learning community use talk to construct knowledge about writing. With a unique interactional structure created by PAR, a specific theory and approach for analyzing, discussing, and making meaning of teacher talk is necessary.

Understanding Teacher Language during Teacher Learning

Freire and Macedo (1987) said, “Language should never be understood as a mere tool of communication. Language is packed with ideology.” This study assumes, along

with Freire and Macedo, that human nature is dialogic and that, as a result, learning requires communication. Sometimes, professional learning is treated as if the words of presenters in short presentations will immediately transfer to practice, as if knowledge can be directly transmitted from one person to another. In contrast, scholarship on teacher professional learning suggests that effective professional learning involves a great deal of talk in order to develop ideas and construct knowledge (Bolam et al, 2005; Desimone, 2011; Vescio et al, 2008). This study approaches teacher talk in PAR PLC from a sociocultural perspective that believes learners construct knowledge through talk. In other words, the language used by participants in the learning community reflects the machinations of the learning community itself. Sociocultural theories involving discourse suggest that the setting and cultural context of talk have an impact on the speakers and listeners (Bahktin, 1981; Wells, 1999). Thus, teacher learning cannot be scripted as each occurrence exists uniquely in the context where it takes place with the people in it. Additionally, dialogic inquiry (Wells, 1999), suggests that knowledge is acquired through questioning and communication. In other words, not only does the context matter, as suggested by sociocultural theorists, but also the talk that takes place within that learning community. A PAR PLC attempts to encourage talk, particularly questioning toward that component of action, in order for educators to learn. Relatedly, Mercer (2000) posed that members of a speech community co-construct knowledge by taking part in collective inquiry. He noted three kinds of talk namely exploratory, disputational, and cumulative. Disputational talk is when the environment tends to be more competitive than collaborative and the language focuses more toward argument and disagreement than

construction of ideas. Cumulative talk, on the other hand, happens when everyone agrees with one another and shares ideas void of criticality. Exploratory talk is where speakers share, listen, critique, and question toward constructing knowledge through discourse. Thus, a sociocultural perspective understands that language is significant to learning. For this study, then, it is necessary to explore teacher talk in order to understand how teachers constructed knowledge about teaching writing within a PAR PLC. Specifically, this research examines patterns of talk within this PAR PLC for instances in which educators did or did not use language to construct knowledge about writing instruction. Thus, the discourse analysis in this study draws upon sociocultural theories in order to better understand teacher language use while teacher learning is taking place.

There are multiple examples of studies which have analyzed teacher talk in professional learning experiences (Barker & Rossi, 2011; Fairbanks & Lagrone, 2006; Razfar, 2012). One example comes from Razfar (2012) with a study of sixty-five mathematics educators and teacher educators at various grade levels coming together at a conference to discuss discourse analysis as a teaching tool. Part of the training involved identifying mathematics as language, and thus, a sociocultural practice as a form of paradigm shift for teachers. Participants noted being able to see the connections the author presented, but what makes this a study of note is the theoretical connection the author makes between language differences of participants when learning and socializing in this group. The author likens the distinction between learning and acquisition (Krashen, 2003) to that of primary discourse and secondary discourse (Gee & Green, 1998). Learning is a secondary discourse because it is explicitly taught, self-chosen, and

not part of primary socialization as part of a cultural or social group one is born into.

Acquisition is a primary discourse because it serves the purpose of being able to play a certain role within an individual's primary social or cultural group (Razfar, 2012). This result suggests for education that as secondary discourse follows primary discourse, or learning follows acquisition, then it stands to reason that an understanding of the cultural context of primary discourse would be necessary to have secondary discourse. This implication here applies to teacher professional learning communities and the way they use language to collaborate; to understand the purpose and context of their discourse is to better understand the ways in which they might be constructing knowledge.

Beyond the context and purpose of talk, sociocultural discourse analysis considers the individual speakers and their perspectives. In Barker and Rossi's (2011) study of seven physical education teachers, they found, through the analysis of these educators' understanding of the term "teamwork," the value of examining teacher language use and communicative competence. The teachers' conception of the term, a curricular one for their content, was constructed differently for each participant and that shaped their teaching practices. The researchers' findings suggested that,

every concept is embedded within personal and communal sets of assumptions and that meaning cannot be taken for granted. These assumptions have enormous significance for what is taught and what is learnt since, even if explanations and classroom practices do not have a one-to-one correlation, teachers' explanations indicate at least what they are attempting to do. (Barker & Rossi, 2011, p. 152).

The impetus of this statement is that a look at the language of teachers, especially as it concerns the profession directly, grants insight into their rationales, perspectives, and

meaning making. Thus, analysis of teacher talk in a learning community should bring these aspects of the individuals in the group to light. As the purpose and context of the learning community on the whole has effect on the speakers, the speakers themselves construct meanings and, thus, have an impact on the nature of the community. The participatory focus of the PAR PLC reflects that symbiosis.

Talk within teacher learning communities can reflect actions; discourse analysis of talk can discern meanings for those actions. Fairbanks and Lagrone (2006), in a study of seven participants in a National Writing Project teacher research group (TRG), employed discourse analysis to explore the language of collaboration and engagement being used to interact and discuss writing. Through a discussion and analysis of the language used in meetings, the researchers identified significant transactions and interactions going on in the group as participants assumed different roles, directed, redirected, agreed, and disagreed. The authors also noted throughout exemplars of transcripts the features of talk that emerged consistently. In this way, the researchers gained a better understanding of how participants shared and constructed knowledge, transformed practice, troubled instruction, and reflected on practices. This is significant in that the teachers showcased how talk and reflection led to plans for action and served as a means of improving professional practice. I would hope to follow a similar path in exploring the talk of participants to better understand how writing instruction is perceived and formulated as well as the ways in which the group problematizes and creates new solutions toward what they have identified as issues with writing instruction.

It follows that PAR in a professional learning community setting creates opportunity for participants to interact actively and engage in language which can reveal a good deal about the workings of that community. Also, sociocultural discourse analysis provides tools to perceive ways in which educators in the PAR PLC use talk to construct knowledge toward improved writing instruction. McTaggart (1997) said of PAR that it is not possible for theory to exist in one place while the implementation occurs in another. McIntyre (2008) adds that PAR “does provide opportunities for co-developing processes *with* people rather than *for* people. Its emphasis on people’s lived experiences, individual and social change, the construction of knowledge” (p. xii) and action as knowing can create places for individuals of various backgrounds to recreate and deconstruct their understandings of society. Both PAR researchers (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013, McIntyre, 2008) and sociocultural discourse analysis (Mercer, 2000) tout the importance of the co-construction of knowledge. PAR allows for researchers and individuals to collect authentic examples of language in use and then analyze those discourse structures to understand how communities construct knowledge. It is at this natural intersection of PAR and sociocultural discourse analysis that this study approaches the proposed research questions. In the methods section, I review discourse analysis and further define it and its use in the data analysis in this study. To first support those methods, the following literature review highlights empirical perspectives pertaining to professional development, professional learning communities, writing instruction in professional learning.

Literature Review

In considering the literature that pertains to my dissertation research, it is necessary to discuss predominantly the research and findings concerning effective professional development and learning communities as well as the gaps in the literature pertaining to PAR as professional learning. In order to conduct this review, I defined a few key terms to search through academic journal databases, via university library system search engines, and various professional journals, books, and websites in the field of education including but not limited to *Teachers College Record*, *Professional Development in Education Journal*, and the 2013 Teaching and Language International Survey (TALIS) web page. The most difficult terms to delineate were “teacher professional development” and “teacher professional learning.” They are closely related, but sources did tend to reveal differences in their use, opting to prefer “professional learning” for more general opportunities for gaining knowledge of the field of teaching. The sheer breadth of research completed on professional development required a more focused search string. I added to my query terms like “tenets,” “collaborative,” “challenges,” and “teacher research.” This allowed for a more focused study of some of the more seminal as well as more recent work on the subject. Additionally, perusal of teacher surveys housed across various professional websites, including TALIS and North Carolina Teacher Working Conditions Survey, was revealing. In reviewing the literature for PAR, I found several books continuously cited by authors, particularly Chevalier and Buckles (2013) and McIntyre (2008), among others. These books served as a jumping off point into the conversation about PAR. To explore gaps in the literature pertaining to

PAR and professional learning, academic journal database searches into more recent PAR studies with the addition of key terms like “professional learning” and “teacher communities” showed what had done as well as suggestions for future research. The following review results from those search efforts and outlines key understandings necessary for responding to the research questions for this study. First, as the research concerns teacher professional development, I highlight evidence toward the tenets of effective professional development. The findings from the PAR PLC in this study reify some of these tenets. Additionally, professional learning communities are a type of professional development, so I describe the components of PLCs and effective traits, again, in order to better respond to the findings from the PAR PLC. Lastly, as the focus of the PAR PLC was writing, I offer insight into the needs and nature of writing instruction professional learning from the literature in order to provide a context for where the PAR PLC was formed.

Tenets of Effective Professional Development

Many components of practice may be considered development, but the intent is what makes the act professional learning (Desimone, 2009; Timperley, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009). At a basic level, teacher professional development refers to experiences that “increase their knowledge and skills, improve their teaching practice, and contribute to their personal, social, and emotional growth” (Desimone, 2011, p. 68). Teachers require a vast skillset, which must be continually maintained, updated, and improved. There is a great deal teachers need to know and be able to do (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Jenkins & Agamba, 2013; Gilles, Wang, Smith, & Johnson, 2013). Professional learning

via professional development can enable better pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1986), which in turn, can allow teachers to make learning more accessible to students (Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). The ever converging and evolving definitions of what constitutes professional development are what make it an elusive, ubiquitous term. Research does, however, clearly support certain key characteristics for professional development to impact instruction and improve student achievement; namely, professional development is most effective that is collaborative, contextual, continuous and regular, focused on student outcomes, inquiry-based and data-driven, challenging yet engaging, and provides agency.

Collaborative. Much of the literature makes an argument that professional development cannot be solely focused upon input; teachers must be allowed to innovate through collaboration (Stillman, 2011; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). Unfortunately, collaborative learning with teachers is often forced and contrived (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Van Driel & Berry, 2012; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008). Several studies have noted that strong professional communities can foster teacher learning (Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001; Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Little, 2002; Stillman, 2011). Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) reported that 2003-2004 School and Staffing Surveys (SASS) showed that only 17% of U.S. teachers reported a collaborative effort amongst colleagues to improve instruction. Despite studies showing the necessity of collaboration for effective professional development, it still eludes the PD process in many teacher professional experiences. In a case study of two high schools, Little and others (2003) found that collaboration amongst teachers created a

greater sense of shared commitment toward improving instruction. Additionally, these groups of teachers were able to maintain focus on goals and make gains toward better student achievement. Grossman and colleagues (2001) found through a case study of teacher community formation that collaboration tended to grant participants heightened responsibility for school improvement and promoted professional growth. The need for collaboration goes a bit beyond the obvious benefits it incurs for teacher learning; as more is expected and mandated of teachers, school systems must be careful to involve teachers in the implementation of programs and changes such that professional development is done with, not to, teachers (Desimone, 2009; Gilles et al., 2009). Collaboration with and amongst teachers steadily becomes a requirement, rather than an optional feature, of effective professional development.

Contextual. According to Borko (2004), professional learning is situative as it occurs collaboratively based off individual use of knowledge from social situations. This builds upon the tenet of collaboration. Research contends that context-specific approaches are more effective than fixed programs of professional development (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Garet et al., 2001; Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Little, 2002; Timperley, 2008). Contextualization of professional development is very much about responsiveness and flexibility. There seems to be a significance in the gains made by learning in practice versus going out and finding something to bring back to make fit the sociocultural environment (Desimone, 2009; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Little, 2002). There is a professional importance of situated professional development communities; professional development

can be utilized as a means of progressing school improvements and reforms when contextualized within the school culture (Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Schlanger & Fusco, 2003).

Contextualization seems to address a need for focus on teachers' pedagogical content knowledge (PCK), a concept deeply researched which pertains to the intersection in teacher knowledge of content and pedagogy where teaching and instruction comes to life (Shulman, 1986). Pedagogical content knowledge allows professional development to be conceptual, individual, and context specific. Pedagogical content knowledge does not identify one master-method of teaching; rather, it allows for highly flexible and adaptable teacher knowledge that recognizes the complexity of teaching (Darling-Hammond, 1998; Goldschmidt & Phelps, 2010; Van Driel & Berry, 2012). In a study of math and science teachers, researchers found that the best gains in student achievement from professional development came when focused on teacher content knowledge focused on instructional integration (Garet et al., 2001) Running counter to the traditional, formulaic, program style of professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Webster-Wright, 2009), contextualized teacher learning considers its rationale and content situationally.

Continuous and regular. One of the greatest challenges to the teaching profession is continuing teacher professional learning in practice; teachers cannot be expected to know everything they will need for an entire career at its outset (Darling-Hammond, 2010). Professional learning is internalized and, thus, more effective when it occurs at regular intervals that allow for continued discussion and enculturation of the

process (Barr et al., 2015; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Webster-Wright, 2009; Wilson & Berne, 1999). In a study of elementary English language arts teachers, Goldschmidt and Phelps (2010) reported that professional development positively impacts teacher pedagogical content knowledge, but results of this lessen given separation from the experience. Findings here promote sustained efforts at continued, regular professional development rather than “one and done” programs. Rigorous, continuous, and embedded teacher learning is not a feature of most professional development programs in the United States today; Darling-Hammond and colleagues (2009) found through national surveys that nine out of ten teachers participated in short-term conferences or stand-alone workshops only. Current professional development is not up to the task of creating a system of sustained teacher learning (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013). The time and monetary constraints placed on the schools and districts most likely plays a powerful role in the lack of emphasis in this area.

Focused on student outcomes. Much of the literature makes an argument that professional development cannot be solely focused upon input; an outcome and practice focus is necessary (Jenkins & Agamba, 2013; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Little et al., 2003; Sato, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2008; Van Driel & Berry, 2012; Wilson & Berne, 1999). The effectiveness of teacher professional development often depends on the focus placed on student outcomes at the outset (Timperley, 2008). In a case study of 113 high school, civics education teachers taking part in a intervention professional development, Barr et al (2015) reported that a focus on student outcomes of the professional development garnered an increased sense of satisfaction and support

amongst teachers due to the clear purpose; additionally, students benefitted from the increased emphasis on teacher learning for increasing student civic engagement.

Webster-Wright (2009) contends that the current focus on delivering content to teachers, rather than teacher learning about how to better instruct students, is unsuited to the modern goals of education. If the formulaic, teacher centric approach to professional learning is the predominant method, and this has resulted in vast disengagement of teachers to professional development (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Vescio et al., 2008; Watson, 2014), then it stands to reason that a fundamental shift, such as a student outcomes approach, may be a good place to start changing ineffectual systems.

Inquiry-based and data-driven. This core component of professional development speaks to the ideal of a teacher as a researcher. Research supports that professional inquiry is essential in professional development (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jenkins & Agamba, 2013; Little, 2002; Van Driel & Berry, 2012; Webster-Wright, 2009). Timperley (2008) believes the key question to drive the inquiry in teacher professional development is, “What do teachers need to learn to promote learning in their students?” With this as a research question, teachers as researchers would be called upon to read studies and collect data in order to answer it. Shkedi (1998), in a case study of 45 elementary school teachers, found that research literature is not a typical part of teacher practice. Additionally, teachers are critical of research for lacking the intangibles in their assessment of the school environment. After exposing teachers to research about their practice, Shkedi saw teachers come to believe that qualitative research captures many of

these intangible components at times. In fact, Shkedi saw that exposure to qualitative research improved teacher learning and knowledge and increased teacher sense of professionalism. Completing the teacher as researcher role, several studies highlight the effectiveness of bringing student data (i.e. work, observations, anecdotes, dialogues) into the professional learning environment (Borko, 2004; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Little et al., 2003; Guskey & Yoon, 2009; Sato et al., 2008). If teachers could begin to take on a researcher mindset in professional development, one where the goal is to strive toward collecting data around questions, then engagement, focus, and results may increase.

Comforting yet challenging and engaging. Various sources provide evidence that professional learning environments require a balance of comfort, challenge, and engagement (Barr et al., 2015; Desimone, 2011; Garet et al., 2009; Gilles et al., 2009; Grossman et al., 2001). This balance is difficult to achieve. In a study of four schools, one elementary, one middle, and two high schools, Little and colleagues (2003) found that a glaring issue in initial attempts at collaboration in professional development was an over-concern for the personal comfort of participants. It was only when the conversation became structured such that critique could happen that professional learning via collaboration occurred. To this end, it falls to the facilitators of professional development to allow productive tension to drive school improvement (Stillman, 2011). Constructive critique of practice drives the professional inquiry and engages participants in the process of transforming practice. Creating an environment conducive to teacher learning requires

a consideration of the participant perspectives and how to negotiate their interactions in ways that promote learning and involvement.

Provides agency. Dewey (1929) promoted the need to grant teachers the auspices and capabilities to respond to and innovate upon various, complex situations rather than trying to control them via formulaic programs and processes. However, the modern U.S. teacher has limited decision-making influences inside and outside of professional development at the school (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009). Stillman (2011), in a study of three elementary teachers, reported that when teachers were given the opportunity to challenge and interact with school policies around instruction that they disagreed with, instructional improvement and professional learning were a result. Stillman attributed this to enhanced sense of authentic purpose and ownership of the schooling environment as a culture of collaborative creation. Teacher agency supported via professional development creates engagement and promotes shared leadership, which in turn leads to a reduction in barriers toward teacher continued involvement in learning (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jenkins & Agamba, 2013; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Little, 2002; Stillman, 2011). Given control over some of the decision-making, teachers might no longer feel that professional development is a requirement, as so many report in the 2013 TALIS, but instead they may begin to transform the profession by considering it a part of the job.

At the heart of this study is the PAR PLC focused on improving writing instruction. As a result, these tenets of effective professional development drove the creation of the learning community, the choice to use participatory action research as a framework for it, and the discussion of findings as the tenets relate to the construction of

knowledge through talk. The perspectives of the educators in this study in particular echo how many of these tenets are missing from teacher professional learning.

Creating Professional Learning Communities

Building upon the tenets of effective professional development, it is necessary to examine the literature studying professional learning communities as they are one type of professional development. The concept of the professional learning community has been derived from business practices of creating organizations for learning (Vescio et al., 2008). Since being modified for education, there have been multiple attempts to define the concept. Newmann (1996) identifies definitional characteristics to PLCs. First, there must be shared values and norms amongst participants. Second, goals must be focused on student learning. The third characteristic is reflective dialogue and continuing conversations. Fourth is the deprivatizing of practice, and the fifth characteristic is collaboration amongst participants. The findings of Newmann's study explore how many of these characteristics play out in the PAR PLC. DuFour (2004) adds that learning, rather than teaching, should be the focus for PLCs. In a large study of professional learning communities, Bolam et al. (2005) further reifies and defines a PLC as a group of school officials with the goal of promoting professional learning and enhancing student outcomes. Watson (2014) builds upon this definition to add that PLCs should include trust, equity, and collective responsibility. The author further notes that PLCs can either challenge or support hegemonic constructs and effective collaborative communities should be capable of bridging worlds of worth and perspective. Lave and Wenger (1991) proposed the concept "communities of practice" wherein members of a group with a

similar goal come together to achieve that goal; from this emerged their concept of “situated learning” which suggests that these individuals teach one another through unique practice and communication in order to teach and learn with one another toward their goals. This is the cornerstone of professional learning; however, there is further research that suggests weaknesses and misconceptions in these definitions, which must be considered before making definite conceptualizations.

In an attempt to create generalizable processes to manufacture professional development utilizing professional learning communities, attempts may have been made to standardize an effectively un-standardizable process. The term “PLC” has come to mean any occurrence of school personnel gathering to discuss a topic; this ubiquitous use does not constitute the tenets and purposes of PLCs (Darling-Hammond, 1995; Pella, 2012; Watson, 2014; Vescio et al., 2008). This lack of focus and purpose may be contributing to teacher disengagement with professional development; many teachers do not take part in professional development due to bad experiences creating the notion in them that the vast majority of professional development is irrelevant and disconnected (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Vescio et al., 2008). Professional learning communities contribute to this when they lack collaboration, research, and reflection; teachers begin to feel that the PLC is more about compliance than about learning (Lieberman & Pointer Mace, 2008; Watson, 2014). The immediate need for many PLCs is to look through the research to find the basic, evidence-based tenets of effective PLCs.

Even when implemented following the tenets of effective PLCs (Bolam et al., 2005; Darling-Hammond, 1995; Newmann, 1996; DuFour, 2004), there are still problems that arise about the nature of effective collaboration and community formation in professional learning. For instance, Watson (2014) challenges the need for shared vision and values amongst PLC participants as a hegemonic construct which hinders development and progress. She argues that true learning occurs through attempts at resolution of dissonance rather than staunch agreement. There is danger in socialization and cultural normalization as too much organizational unity can inhibit change. Vescio, Ross, and Adams (2008) note that too many PLCs lack risk-taking and authentic, idea-challenging conversations amongst stakeholders. The authors task PLCs, by definitional requisites, to be able to demonstrate changed teaching practices and improved student learning. Lieberman and Pointer Mace (2008) discuss that not enough is done to conceptualize the idea of teacher learning. These authors argue that a reflection on research, not just the self, is a missing component in PLCs. They note that research adds to the pool of knowledge for the community from which participants can draw. Considering these arguments to not only the misuse of the traditional definition of PLC but also the implications of certain components of the current definitions, it is possible to frame what could perhaps be considered an operational definition of what a PLC should be across from the effective tenets of professional development for the purposes of this research.

It is thus that the core tenets of effective professional development are echoed in professional learning communities. According to critical findings from research,

professional learning communities should build upon the effective components of professional development in the following ways:

- Collaborative in an attempt at improving student learning
- Building of trust amongst participants such that sharing is fluid, critical, and authentic
- Reflective of self, group, cultural, professional, and global perspective and practices
- Challenging of notions, practices, and ideals toward improving practice
- Equitable such that communities where participant perspectives each carry equal weight
- Responsible for demonstrating changed teaching practices and improved student learning

It is possible to see through the requirements of these key components of professional learning communities that a new model for implementation may be necessary to meet these goals. Talk is implicit in all of these components. The use of a PAR PLC framework provides a means to develop talk that is exploratory and aides in constructing knowledge. Exploratory talk encompasses so many of these components; it is reflective, challenging, equitable, and reciprocal (Mercer, 2000). In this way, a PAR PLC framework might address many of these needed components. Next, I consider gaps in the literature that suggest more work to be done to understand the effective facilitation of PLCs and how PAR could play into that.

Gaps in the Literature

Action research has been experimented with in conjunction with professional development, mostly as individual practitioner research and occasionally as a study of group dynamics with the researcher as a non-participant or admitted presence only (Ado, K., 2013; Ioannidou-Koutselini, & Patsalidou, 2015; López-Pastor, Monjas, & Manrique, 2011); these studies I would describe as lacking the requisite participatory element in PAR. That participatory element, which challenges the norm of academia whereby a power structure of “us” and “them” is created, forces the researcher back into a societal role within the participant group and wholly differentiates participatory action research from more traditional forms of action research (Chevalier & Buckles, 2008, 2013; McTaggart, 1997). There is a great deal of participatory action research done in education, but most of the focus of these studies is in the use of PAR with participants to make improvements to a particular community or parent involvement program (Rocha-Schmidt, 2010; Snell, Miguel, & East, 2009), a specific classroom’s processes (Ball, 2009; Sluys, 2010; Trauth-Nare & Buck, 2011), teacher preparation programs (Dahl, 2014; Goh & Loh, 2013; McIntyre, 2003), and to understand and/or transform critical sociocultural issues within education at classroom, school, and district levels (Clark, Lee, Goodman, & Yacco, 2008; Henderson, 2014). Participatory action research is not so narrow as this; it does ask the researcher to act as a participant, but it also gives a reason for this. By placing all participants into the greater fold of society and considering the researcher as an impact on the interplay between the community and the world, rather than trying to remove them for analysis, implications from studies are more realistic

(Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Kemmis, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). In other words, PAR argues that trying to pretend the researcher is not present is counter-intuitive to studying the nature of the community in focus. This does not imply that PAR is more generalizable in a traditional sense than action research. Instead, it simply posits that this approach allows for a more natural consideration of the occurrences during a study as part of the whole of existence rather than a one-time, purely unique event.

If the PAR experience were merely intersubjective, that would be easy. If it were merely scientific, that would be no problem, but arising every morning torn between a desire to methodically save the world and a desire to savour it is something else (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013, p. 5).

The use of participatory action research (PAR) as a form of professional development is a gap in educational research. This study hopes to add to the work that has been done with discourse analysis to explore the complexities of the interactions amongst professional development groups, especially by expounding on the work with participatory action research, an area that has not traditionally used much discourse analysis. Several studies represent similar attempts to my own work with PAR as professional development. Ado (2013) introduced action research projects as a method of professional learning amongst early career high school teachers. Findings showed action research opening avenues for teachers to gain support from school stakeholders, empowering teachers to make decisions, and fostering a professional environment amongst colleagues. Data analysis included both quantitative descriptive statistics of Likert scale items as well as qualitative coding of interview. This is a strength in this study as it allowed the author to get at a wider range of understandings about the

interactional through qualitative and the outcomes through quantitative methods. The focus of this study was the perspectives of the teachers as they took part in the action research and the outcomes of those projects. This study does not really get at the language used by the teachers other than in broad terms through coding. Additionally, there is no critical focus. “Empowerment” is mentioned, but not in terms of social constructs that might be deconstructed through action research or that might be held in place by certain interactional features. Besides a focus on the language of teachers during meetings, this dissertation hopes to consider the context of the PAR PLC as it pertains to the ways in which educators interact toward taking action about writing instruction.

Another study by James (2006), involved PAR as a project for seventeen educators to gain a better understanding of homeless and transient school populations. The author of this study was strongly grounded in criticality from the perspective of schools ostracizing through ignorance certain students. The goal was to transform teacher thinking through learning, a goal of PAR. This study is another example of PAR where language, while a factor in coding of data, is not really a major consideration during the analysis; rather, the author discussed the broader perspectives of teachers through interviews, surveys, and discussions. This study does provide insight into how teachers collaborate around school-based issues toward taking action. The author notes the ways in which teachers meeting leads to outcomes to address critical problems in the context, a goal of PAR. This dissertation research involving the PAR PLC on writing instruction would add to this with a focus on the teacher talk and how action came about as a result of co-constructing knowledge.

López-Pastor and colleagues (2011) conducted a longitudinal study over fifteen years with physical education teachers conducting action research as a form of professional learning. The group grew from five to thirty-seven participants. The goals of the group centered on designing, carrying out, and sharing action research at the school and within the community. The researchers analyzed their data, consisting of agendas, interviews, and action research project designs, in stages of the group's formation. This study became truly participatory in that the researchers were participants from the outset. As PAR ascribes, they became immersed in the culture in order to study it. The data analysis revealed that many steady participants appreciated the program and noted marked change in practice, and some others came and went with no marked change. The marked area of interest from this study was the progress of a PAR program of professional learning over time and the danger of a lack of enculturation of potentially creating a group that is exclusionary. Another concept to consider is the fact that PAR components were not an integrative aspect of the group meetings but rather a vehicle of practice reflection and learning; the PAR PLC from this study was built and practiced upon the tenets of PAR along with the practice of conducting teacher research.

Perhaps the most closely aligned with the PAR PLC conception of participatory action research with professional development comes from Koutselini (2008). This study had the unique setting of Cyprus where, at the time of the study, there were no male teachers employed. The participants included sixteen elementary teachers from three schools, two principals, and the researcher. Telling is the inclusion of the researcher in both participation and analysis. That is a crucial component to PAR which allows the

researcher to reflect on the group as a participant observer. Data collection and analysis does look at language, though not so closely as in a discourse analysis; the focus is on larger interactional themes between people rather than the use of language to construct meaning. One significant component of the study is the use of journals to track reflections of each participant; the perspectives of the teachers added a great deal to the understanding of how the educators interact. The author emphasized with a critical lens the power structures and dominance that took place between individuals. Through PAR as a guiding principal for the formation of the professional learning group, the researcher noticed certain authoritarian constructs collapse. This study gets to the core of how PAR can be integrated into professional development; participant interactions drive learning and action. Building upon that notion, this dissertation about PAR PLC on writing concerns itself with the nuances of language that reveal sociocultural constructs of discourse.

As these studies suggest, PAR has been deemed a worthy vehicle for professional learning in education. The real gap lies with examining the discourse taking place in those meetings to explore ways in which talk drives the construction of knowledge and how that learning leads to action. Many of these studies have explained in detail the perspectives of participants and the contexts of the learning communities. Additionally, they discuss how those components came together to lead toward certain actions based on community goals. What is missing is the story in-between the two. Context and perspective do not themselves result in action; rather, the conversations that the participants have and the ways in which they use talk to learn needs to be a part of the

research in order to have a discussion about how professional learning works and can be oriented toward community goals. The PAR PLC on writing is designed to address community goals around the needs of writing instruction, and the sociocultural discourse analysis explores the talk to understand how the community negotiated and arrived at those goals. The following section considers what work has been done to assess the needs of writing instruction, particularly in secondary schools.

The Needs of Writing Instruction

Writing instruction will serve as the topic for professional learning within this community. This is for two reasons; first, teachers taking part in the study indicated that as the area which they most wanted to make strides in transforming, and second, writing instruction tends to be a highly neglected area of effective professional development (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Darling-Hammond et al., 2009) that could benefit from a redesign as proposed by the PAR learning community concept. A learning community focused on improving writing instruction, as with the PAR PLC in this study, could benefit from an understanding of some of the work that has been done to understand effective writing instruction practices. Much has been written about good writing instruction. For instance, Calkins (1983) presented a case study of an elementary-aged student writing for class. Through this, the author advocated for teaching writing as a process and peer review, emphasizing the dialogic nature of learning to write. Similarly, Graves (1983) supported the teacher involvement in student writing development, urging the use of student-teacher writing conferences to discuss writing. Atwell (1987), building upon those notions, promoted through her own classroom work with writing the use of

writing workshops and mini-lessons. For this study, those notions are important to note as a background to the role writing instruction played in the PAR PLC meetings. Notions of writing workshops, writing portfolios, and discussions about writing with students took place throughout the meetings. Participants developed those ideas through talk together to incorporate them into transformed practices. In addition, it is necessary to consider the deficits in writing instruction and writing instruction professional learning in secondary schools. This is because the PAR PLC took place in the context of writing instruction in a secondary school and focused on improving the professional learning of those teachers in that regard. At this juncture, a better understanding of the current state of writing instruction and writing professional development in U.S. schools will help contextualize the work of the learning community in this study.

Writing instruction in high schools. There is a wealth of information about writing instruction in secondary schools and how students learn to write. The majority of writing in high school takes the form of narrative responses to literature, with research taking place only once or twice a school year across all classes, and only a smattering of instances of contextualized, life-skills based writing reported. A majority of teachers use models to show examples of expected writing; however, many students report a lack of explicit instruction on how to produce writing like modeled examples (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Graham, Gillespie, & McKeown, 2013; Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Writing requires the ability to transfer a number of skills and intelligences from multiple content areas to be effective. This cognitive ability to use their learning in a multiplied modality such as writing is not explicitly taught in many situations (Graham et al., 2013; Kiuahara,

Graham, & Hawken, 2009). Students are most successful given situations to make some choices in the writing process and learn the techniques to combine in responding to written assignments (Olson & Land, 2007; Scherff & Piazza, 2005). Along these same lines, research has shown that student achievement with writing improves given more domain-specific writing tasks with explicit instruction as to their context (Graham et al., 2013; Kaplan, Lichtinger, & Margulis, 2011). Effective environments and situations for student writing involve clear, individualized expectations and outcomes; students are more motivated given a purpose and an audience (Kaplan, 2008; Mason et al., 2012). One of the most pervasive issues in writing instruction in high schools in the US has been a confusion between students and teachers about the function and form that writing plays as many students fail to see the connection between writing and the “real” world despite teachers insisting upon the necessity of becoming writers (Applebee & Langer, 2011). In writing as instruction, what has been observed is an abundance of writing to learn, or trying to make sense of content through written language as explanation or narrative, but a dearth of learning to write, or explicit writing instruction (Fry & Villagomez, 2012; Graham & Perrin, 2006; Kiuahara et al., 2009). This dichotomy between writing-to-learn and learning-to-write came up frequently in the PAR PLC meetings during this study.

Another point consistent in the literature is that there is a disconnect between the design and expectation of secondary school writing and that of the writing that occurs in college, the workplace, and the language at home for many students; however, students tend to be more motivated when they can see connections toward these contexts (Applebee & Langer, 2011; Conley, 2008; Kiuahara et al., 2009). Recent studies in the

connection between technology and writing suggest that technology proficiencies of already marginalized student populations can widen the writing achievement gap (Relles & Tierney, 2013; García-Sánchez & Rojas-Lizana, 2012). Additionally, Gutierrez, Zitlali Morales, & Martinez (2009) found that deficit models of teaching, a focus on all the shortcomings rather than playing to strengths of each individual student, contribute to many culturally non-majority students becoming disengaged in school writing. Students cannot see their own lives in the work they are asked to do and, thus, struggle through it. This concept also plays out across studies of writing that have found that there is a cultural disconnect between the language of school writing and the social languages of many students (Danzak, 2011; García-Sánchez & Rojas-Lizana, 2012; Rumberger & Palardy, 2005). This is part of a larger examination of US schooling where researchers have noted that teacher thinking and practice in general lacks a necessary criticality in regards to power structures, racial and ethnic differences, and student disenfranchisement (Howard, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). An overarching theme amongst the literature is the need for a more individualized consideration of students, their sociocultural backgrounds, and their current abilities toward providing autonomy and opportunities for authentic writing practice; for many educators, a paradigm shift of this kind would require a high-level of support. This kind of support could be offered through the sort of professional learning made available through frameworks like PAR PLC and others.

Outlining some of the above-mentioned trends, Applebee and Langer (2011) conducted a four-year study of middle and high schools nationwide. In this study, they

found that much had improved in the thirty years since the last national study, but that many problems remained and new issues had emerged. Of greatest issue may be that writing instruction remains largely teacher-centered with students as supporting actors; the teacher creates, via writing the prompt and creating the requirements, and the students “does” the writing, merely filling in required components rather than composing. They also found that little class time is devoted to explicit writing instruction; the teacher typically assumes writing competence and expects results based on content. The researchers emphasize that teachers ask for analysis and let the writing instruction lead toward discussions during class, yet the missing connection found in this study seems to be that the condensation of these expectations after teachers create assignments largely results in regurgitation and summarization by students. This study implies that teachers require more learning on how to effectively teach writing in a student-centered manner despite working in environments that privilege, through administrative and testing standards, more traditional high-stakes, formulaic writing. This is a challenge in environments where testing, and typically reading tests, dominate the policy discussions. The next section coalesces some of the work done with teacher professional learning with writing to better explain the need for a PAR PLC learning community to address the needs of teacher of writing.

Teachers, professional development, and writing. The National Writing Project (NWP) is a professional learning initiative intent on improving teacher confidence as teachers of writing through professional development experiences. They have been working with teachers on writing and writing instruction for over forty years. NWP has

sites in all 50 states that support teachers in improving their writing instruction. They do this by getting teachers to talk about and try out practices with other teachers in order to get at the dialogic nature of professional learning. In this way, NWP has its own model of professional learning. As a result, they have produced a good deal of understanding about the challenges teachers face in writing and some of the failings and successes of writing professional development. Andrews (2008), in a treatise summarizing decades of NWP work, gleaned the following tenets that relate to teacher writing professional learning:

1. Teachers of writing are writers themselves.
2. Writers need peer feedback.
3. Teachers should write when students write.
4. Research about writing instruction is important to best practices.
5. Teachers can be researchers.
6. Writings teachers are the best teachers for writing teachers.
7. Teachers of writing must understand the writing process.

As a result, effective writing teachers are writers, teachers of writing pedagogy, and researchers on how to teach writing. In a study of NWP learning communities, Wood and Lieberman (2000) found that not only did collaborations amongst teachers about writing instruction make participants better writers, but it also made them more confident about writing as a content and the teaching of writing. Thus, there is evidence that a learning community can be implemented in a way to improve the teaching of writing. This provides a good basis from which to discuss a learning community focused on writing

instruction. Next, I consider some example literature that has specifically explored teacher professional learning with writing instruction.

Some research has been done recently on teacher professional learning with writing instruction. Locke (2015), in a study with different implementations of teacher writing professional development workshops in New Zealand, found some strengths and weaknesses of teachers and writing and the professional development of writing according to teachers in the study. He gleaned that these workshops could be unfocused, dominated by the few, and offer few writing opportunities. In workshop components that gave opportunities to write, distributed equitable contributions amongst participants, were research-based, and brought explorations back to classroom practice, teachers both responded more positively in the session and were able to articulate ways to improve writing instruction. In another study of teacher writing workshops, Bifuh-Ambe (2013) saw that participants actually worsened in their responses about their confidence to teach writing. The author rationalized that this might have been because some of the delivery of professional learning content was directly targeted at contradicting what many teachers had been doing with writing; this affectively lowered their belief in themselves as writing teachers. The author noted that teachers responded far more favorably to conversational and problem-solving workshop style professional learning and saw more confidence generated from this than other deliveries. Teachers tend to implement new skills and instructional strategies with more fidelity and confidence when they are received in peer-coaching situations (Joyce & Showers, 2013). These findings imply that not just any professional development will improve writing instruction; collaboration and a collegial

atmosphere with goal-orientation has proven successful to have a positive reception by teachers as writing instruction is concerned. Participatory action research has been shown to help create communities with these attributes.

Much work has been done on writing instruction and teachers of writing with communities of the National Writing Project, such as the study by Lieberman and Wood (2003) that found in a NWP community of practice that teachers of writing could improve their writing instruction by becoming better writers themselves and engaging other professionals in and about writing. This is most likely due to the success of NWP as a form of professional development. For example, in 2010, 96 percent of the 3,000 teachers who took part in the NWP institute reported a higher confidence in their ability to write and teach writing (Stokes, 2011). There are many more teachers, however, who have not and do not take part in NWP programs. The work of the NWP provides insight into what has worked in writing professional development. More work is needed to extend that; this study hopes to do that by examining the teacher talk in a learning community focused on improving writing instruction. To that end, Pella (2011) adds that the quality of discourse within a community matters a great deal to the outcomes of it. Thus, it stands that more research is needed which speaks to the talk in PLCs about the teaching of writing. This could lead to a better understanding of writing professional development and create more opportunities for all teachers to improve writing instruction. Participatory action research could lend towards helping these teachers create communities centered around writing instruction.

To summarize, PAR in education as a means of professional development with teachers has been done. Factors still needing to be addressed include a focus on language as a means of understanding interactional, social, and cultural components, a closer look at writing as an area for professional learning, and situating findings such that their localized, unique implications can be thought of as a part of, not excluded from, society as a whole, in this case, meaning teachers in relation to other teachers, school personnel, students, researchers, the community, and so on. That last component is a transformative piece described so often in the PAR literature (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Kemmis, 2006; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Wadsworth, 1998; Whyte, 1991), but so rarely put into practice. My dissertation addresses these gaps in the literature through a detailed analysis of the teacher talk in a PAR PLC focused on improving writing instruction. The discourse analysis of the meetings undertakes the task of revealing the dialogic nature of professional learning that has not been a part of PAR studies. This study of the PAR PLC offers the unique perspective of how the language of educators doing participatory action research promotes effective professional learning. The focus on writing instruction came from the teachers, not from a prescriptive program, so that in itself casts a unique spin on the study. For writing instruction, this study offers a lens through which teachers can talk about writing and actions they want to take toward improving writing instruction; that teacher-driven aspect of professional learning is an intriguing focus for research. Lastly, the discussion of the findings tackles the contextualization piece where the meetings of the PAR PLC had a purpose outside of their own existence; educators wanted to share practice, change the school improvement plan, and go outside of their own school to talk

about their work. Contextualizing the results of the work done in the PAR PLC contributes an element not always addressed in PAR which sometimes tries to decontextualize as if the research could not inform any other work being done.

Specifically, this study offers ways in which the PAR PLC framework could be applied to other learning communities and the potential for research about how schools can create those communities.

CHAPTER III

METHODS

This research seeks to understand how educators use language in a PAR PLC to co-construct knowledge about the teaching of writing. There are two research questions being posed:

- How do educators use language to construct knowledge about the teaching of writing in this participatory action research learning?
- How does educator language use change over the course of time in this learning community about writing?

To begin, I first detail the pilot study which informed this current study. Then, I describe the research site and educators taking part in the study. Next, I provide a detailed explanation of the qualitative research design employed to respond to these research questions.

Pilot Study

I piloted this study as a case study in the 2014-2015 school year at the same school where I conducted this study. There were seven participants in that study including myself, five of whom also chose to participate in the following study. We met monthly throughout the school year for a total of nine meetings lasting about an hour. We began meeting because the principal wanted me to come out to the school to talk about writing instruction as I was a former teacher at the school and she felt comfortable with

my level of knowledge about the topic. I asked if I could collect some data about the group pertaining to my interest in professional learning to which the principal and the teachers acquiesced. The teachers taking part in the study volunteered and were all members of either the English department or Social Studies department. The administrator and myself also participated in meetings. We began by discussing some current trends I saw in writing instruction and over the course of meetings used those to talk about what everyone saw in their classrooms with writing. Additionally, I asked at the end of meetings about teachers' experiences with professional learning and their perspectives on it. I also conducted interviews with teachers to further collect data about their views on professional learning in education. All the meetings and interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed. The focus of the research and analysis were the perspectives of teachers and the ways in which they interacted within the learning community.

The pilot study informed this dissertation in several ways. Analysis of transcripts revealed that the teachers were mostly unsatisfied with the professional learning they had received from both the county and elsewhere, citing particularly that there was no focus on application and they never really got to develop ideas with other teachers. From this and further conversations with the teachers from that study, the concept of the PAR PLC began to develop. My work with PAR showed me ways in which it could respond to some of the needs from the community. Additionally, many from that study noticed that, while we had robust conversations, they were not always guided and meetings lacked structure. The ideas for PAR PLC grew from that as well as a means to add fluidity to the

meetings. Lastly, the coding of transcripts from the meetings allowed for me to see some broad trends from the interactions between participants; however, it was not until I began to conduct some discourse analysis with selected portions of the transcripts that I saw how teacher talk shaped the interactions and the creation of ideas during the meetings. As a result, this dissertation employs a research question directly focused on the analysis of language toward how teachers construct knowledge. In so doing, understanding language helps explain the successes and failures in the teacher professional learning about writing.

The pilot study offered an opportunity to test ideas and develop concepts toward conducting dissertation research. The experience also helped to form a report with the school and the teachers, most of whom I had never worked with while I had been at the school. Through the pilot, the community began to decide what exactly we wanted to do toward the end of better writing instruction. From a perspective of conducting teacher research, I gained a better idea of how to act as a participant-observer and negotiate my own role in the community. Also, the research question furrowed itself out through needs that arose in the analysis of pilot study data. The pilots served as a testing ground for ways to interact and informed the development of how we eventually ended up using PAR PLC in the group. In these ways, the pilot study helped to develop some important understandings for this dissertation.

Research Site

This study explores a participatory action learning community at a small, rural, innovative high school in the southeastern United States, called Southeastern High School (a pseudonym). I previously worked as a teacher at this high school and was last

employed there three years before the start of data collection for this study. As a result, only two participants in this study had worked with me when I was at the school. This created an advantage in that I had a connection to enter the community, but it was also a disadvantage in that I was still an outsider and not a classroom teacher like the rest. The high school is innovative in that students elect to attend the school in lieu of attending their district high school within the county. Housed on a community college campus, the school offers students the opportunity to earn college credit while attending high school. Each year, the school takes all applicants from around the county and holds a lottery to determine 80 students that will comprise the entering class. The lottery, conducted by a non-district entity, favors students who are first-generation college attending, minority, and low-socioeconomic status. Thus, the participating high school purports a representatively diverse student population of over 300 students with five classes, the fifth year being almost wholly comprised of students attending one high school class while earning their associate's degree. The demographic makeup of the school in 2015 was 63% white, 24% black, 7% Hispanic, 1% Asian, and 5% reported two or more races. The number of students participating in the free or reduced lunch program was 54%. Only 2% of students were identified as English language learners in 2015. The staff was comprised of eleven classroom teachers, one administrator, one counselor, and one office personnel. The classrooms and offices that comprise the physical makeup of the school are located in two separate buildings on the community college's campus.

In terms of professional development, the opportunities and expectations for the teachers is mixed. During the pilot study the administrator who took part stated that she

believes the county has “no clear objectives” and that schools are essentially left to their own devices, yet they are given objectives to focus on like vocabulary building, literacy, or reviewing testing data. The review of testing data has been particularly troubling as the teachers reported, according to conversations during the pilot study, to understand how to read the data, but they had no training about how that data should impact instruction.

They added that this is troubling because students regularly score very well on state assessments, achieving above 85% proficiency in all testing categories; with a focus on college readiness, they noted the need to understand ways to continue to improve student learning. The county has a few professional development days throughout the year where like-content teachers are expected to meet and discuss, but the administrator reports that most teachers do not like the lack of organization and do not report major instructional revelations during these meetings. The administrator reports that most of the teachers go outside of the county for professional learning opportunities. Many staff members, but not all, attend conferences and take online coursework. Those outside resources have been the predominant sources of writing professional development. The administrator supports this by asking that teachers organize learning communities to share this information with each other, but she worries that it is not structured and goal-oriented enough to truly lead to teacher learning and instructional implementation. There is a successful, according to the administrator, group that meets to discuss student action plans to help those students who have been identified as struggling or failing in multiple classes. No group had been formed before to address writing instruction or teacher research; however, some groups of teacher had presented assessment data at local and

statewide conferences. In short, the school leadership is very eager to implement professional development that is effective, but they self-report as needing more support. Chapter II gave a general concept of how meetings in a PAR PLC operated; Chapter IV better tells the story of how the PAR PLC worked to address needs and meet challenge for professional learning with writing with these educators.

Participants

The principal and lead social studies teacher expressed a need for professional learning around writing for teachers at the school. Thus, during the pilot study, five teachers, an administrator, and myself participated. In the new school year, two of those participant teachers found other employment. Three returning teachers, the administrator, and myself took part in this dissertation research. Participants in this study who returned from the pilot learning community were a black male English language arts teacher (Gabe), a white male English language arts teacher (Luther), a black female social studies teacher (Angela), and a white female administrator (Fran). New members included a white male social studies teacher (Alfred), a white female first-year math teacher (Ali), a black female first-year science teacher (Cass), a white female English language arts teacher (Leslie), and a Latino male Spanish as a foreign language teacher (Martin). All staff members were invited to participate in the PAR PLC, but the administrator, Fran, strongly encouraged humanities teachers to participate because Of particular interest to the study will be the addition of these new voices to the conversation, including some first year teachers. Table 1 shows the pseudonyms of the participants with corresponding demographic information and beliefs about writing professional development drawn from

the first two meetings. I provide more detailed profiles for the participants in the analysis section.

Table 1

Participant Pseudonyms, Demographics, and Writing PD Experience

Name	Demographics	Writing PD Experience	Teacher Research Interest
Gabe	Black, male, English language arts teacher	Excited about teaching writing; disliked PD	Student motivation with writing, interviewing
Luther	White, male, English language arts teacher	Excited about teaching writing; avoided PD	Student writing for fun, interviewing, assignment design
Leslie	White, female, English language arts teacher	Loved teaching writing, had some good PD	Writing-to-learn, surveys
Angela	Black, female, social studies teacher	Wanted to know more about teaching writing, had some good PD	Student motivation, surveys
Fran	White, female, administrator	Believed in good writing as a basis for learning; wanted focused PD	Managing classroom writing, conferencing
Alfred	White, male, social studies teacher	Worried about teaching writing; didn't like PD	Student writing motivation
Ali	White, female, first-year math teacher	Interested in learning about writing; still experiencing PD	Data collection around writing
Cass	Black, female, first-year science teacher	Excited about teaching writing; not excited about PD	Writing-to-learn versus learning-to-write
Martin	Latino, male, Spanish as a Foreign Language teacher	Loved teaching writing; had bad experiences with PD	Student writing interests, conferencing

Research Design

Participatory action research is not a research methodology as much as it is a research *style* that rests within multiple methodologies (Reason & Bradbury, 2008). This is a significant consideration when designing a PAR study. This research study is a qualitative case study (Stake, 1995) of the participatory action research professional learning community (PAR PLC) wherein the research question presented has been designed with the intent for discourse analysis (Gee, 2014; Mercer, 2000) as it primarily concerns language use. Stake (1995) says, "...the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the multiple realities, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening" (p. 12). Stake's take on qualitative case study research aligns with the theoretical framework employing discourse analysis used in this study. The idea of approaching research with the understanding that each individual constructs his own perspective and meaning fits the lens of discourse analysis investigating how educators construct knowledge through talk. Stake (1995) asserts that every case is unique and should be "bounded" by definite grounds differentiating it and limiting it to that which applies to the issues at hand, particularly the people; likewise, the theoretical approach to this study assumes the complexity of the individuals and their interactions eschewing the overly generalizable notion that participants are merely actors playing one static role through its processes.

For this study, I draw on Stake's (1995) concept of an instrumental case study, which focuses on understanding a larger question with the case in question as a mode of increasing that understanding; this is in contrast to what he describes as an intrinsic case

study in which the case itself is the only focus. An instrumental case study design allows me to take the perspective of understanding these educators' experiences within the PAR PLC as part of the context of professional learning experiences they have had. This design takes into account a need to learn about the context, its interactions, and the language beyond just knowing the participants during the data collection process, ideas very much in line with participatory action research.

Case study research seeks to understand the complex, unique nature of the case in question (Stake, 1995); participatory action research also tries to make such meaning, but it adds an interactional level with participants toward change in the community as the community sees the need. With that said, any research questions used in PAR must be shared and, usually, negotiated with all participants (McIntyre, 2008; Wadsworth, 1998). The language that practitioners use provides significant clues as to the social dynamics involved, and that is a point of entry for action research (Stringer, 2007). However, as a participant researcher, I presented participants with questions of research interest to my own perspective upon entering the study; while these were of interest to the participants, they had questions of their own to bring to the conversation which we developed through the PAR PLC. These questions focused on improving writing instruction; examples include, "How do we improve writing motivation?" and, "Can you teach critical thinking with writing?" along with many more. Participants agreed that for my purposes, language was an excellent focus, and they allowed me to proceed with the following questions. The primary research question is qualitatively designed and discourse analysis has been used to address it. This question is, *how do educators use language to construct knowledge (or*

not) about writing instruction in a participatory action research learning community on writing? It suggests the exploration of a unique occurrence, the PAR PLC, as it pertains to the perspectives of those taking part. The second research question is, *how does participant language use change over the course of time in this learning community about writing?* This question complements the primary question by allowing for deeper discourse analysis to better consider the patterns of participant talk as it changed, an idea that is useful in the framework of discourse analysis that emphasizes contextual co-creation of knowledge and speech patterns (Mercer, 2000) drawn upon by this study.

The juxtaposition of PAR with the development of a learning community like PAR PLC in this study requires a mindset that is prepared to explore participant beliefs and perspectives, a qualitative ideal. The transformative components of the research questions come across from the implication of change to the current practices of community and professional development, or how did the teacher talk in the PAR PLC change over time. There are several affordances and constraints of PAR with teacher professional development which have effects on this study. A majority of PAR studies are qualitative. Qualitative research tries to emphasize the importance of individual complexities of situations and typically employs an inductive line of reasoning (Creswell, 2009), which is more in-line with the recognition by both PAR and discourse analysis that evidence might support multiple probable realities rather than any one absolute (Gee, 2014; Kemmis, 2006). Additionally, qualitative research can function from a stance that seeks to champion social justice (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), a concept very much in sync with the criticality in PAR (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). These aims of qualitative

research explain why most PAR studies operate out of a qualitative paradigm. This does not mean that qualitative data collection is always best for participatory action research studies. It can be argued that while qualitative research does compensate for the fact that quantitative methods do not allow for rich understanding of context or setting, it creates an issue of bias and the error of personal interpretation from one worldview (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). While PAR is not concerned about personal bias as long as it is acknowledged and reported as part of the study, in fact it embraces personal biases (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000; Stringer, 2007), some current PAR practitioners find a void in the capabilities of qualitative research as it typically encompasses a perspective only made up from the worldview of the researcher (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). This hinders the abilities of analysis to consider multiple perspectives to the extent that the researcher allows, through data collection and analysis, participant perspectives to become embedded. With these weaknesses acknowledged, this study employs a case study methodology utilizing, thematic coding and discourse analysis to address the research questions. I discuss the merits of this method of analysis later in this section.

Data Collection

For this dissertation research study, I collected data to explore how educators used language to construct knowledge (or not) in discussions during PAR PLC meetings focused on writing instruction. Data collection relies mainly on group discussions during 14 weekly meetings with educators in the afternoons on the campus of the participating school. Each meeting was video recorded using a camcorder, and I took detailed field notes while participating as a member of the learning community. Video played a

significant role in supporting the development of field notes during the transcription process. Surveys were also used in an attempt to support language change and community change over time.

Video-recorded PLC discussions. Of particular interest in this process are the ways in which all participants are interacting using language, whether successfully or not. Every meeting, 14 in total, was recorded using a camcorder setting upon a tripod in a corner of the meeting room. I also used a voice recorder sitting on the table to catch the conversations in case of video issues. Over 25 hours of footage were collected through this method. After each meeting, I transcribed the videos additionally noting non-verbal language pertaining to the construction of knowledge. I prepared all transcripts myself rather than relying on an outside service. I typed each meeting's transcript into word processing software using a slowed-down version of the video recording. I used the transcription process as part of my data analysis. I discuss this further, including coding of transcripts, in the data analysis section of this methods chapter.

Field notes. Part of the rationale for using video recording of the meetings is to support the notion of full participation in the PAR (McIntyre, 2008). I took field notes while I was engaged in the learning community as a participant observer; however, my first priority was to pay close attention to the meeting. I later viewed the recording and added to my notes what I may have missed with respect to participant actions and interactions, movements, ques, and notable references. Pertinent actions were included beside dialogue in parenthesis. The research questions explicitly imply the importance of talk; however, the choice to also mark some non-verbal ques came about as I noticed they

seemed related to how participants constructed knowledge. For example, at one point Alfred leaned forward and put his hands on the table directly in front of Gabe as he was talking. This caused Gabe to hesitate in his speaking. I felt that portion of the exchange merited inclusion in the transcript as that hesitation probably influenced Gabe's next words. I was able to use notes like these to bring action to the transcript of what was said and better describe the events that took place in the meetings; that has allowed me to address how participants use language to construct knowledge (or not) by better relating the story of the PAR PLC about writing instruction.

Slider-scale surveys. As support for the discourse analysis in relation to the second research question, I conducted Likert style, slider scale surveys to gauge participant notions of professional development prior to the start of the community meetings. I also used the same survey at the mid-point and end of the study to help understand any changes in perspective about professional learning among the educators. Guskey (2002) notes the effectiveness of Likert style surveys to successfully evaluate professional development. However, some have noted the limitation of Likert results, particularly the challenge in data analysis involving descriptive statistics because there is not a regular interval in a Likert scale; rather, it is considered an ordinal measure (Bayer & Thomas, 2004; Roster, Lucianetti, & Albaum, 2015). I used a Likert *style* approach, but one which used an interval approach to data. A slider scale, where two extremes are proposed on either end of a bar and participants can note their level or ranking between the dichotomy, is an interval scale. To simplify, it is hard to talk about teacher perspectives using survey data when the difference between “1” or “strongly disagree”

and a “2” or “slightly disagree” is not an accurately definable, numerical distance.

Whereas with a slider scale numbered between 0 and 100, the placement by a participant can be defined and the space, or interval, between the numbers is regular. Another advantage to the slider scale that I used in this study was to save participant slider placements and to allow them to move them further toward either end of the spectrum at each new survey. This helped create a clear sense of change over time and speak toward the third research question about the development of the community. The figure below reveals the slider survey that I implemented three times during data collection, before the group met for the first time, after the fifth meeting, and after the last meeting.

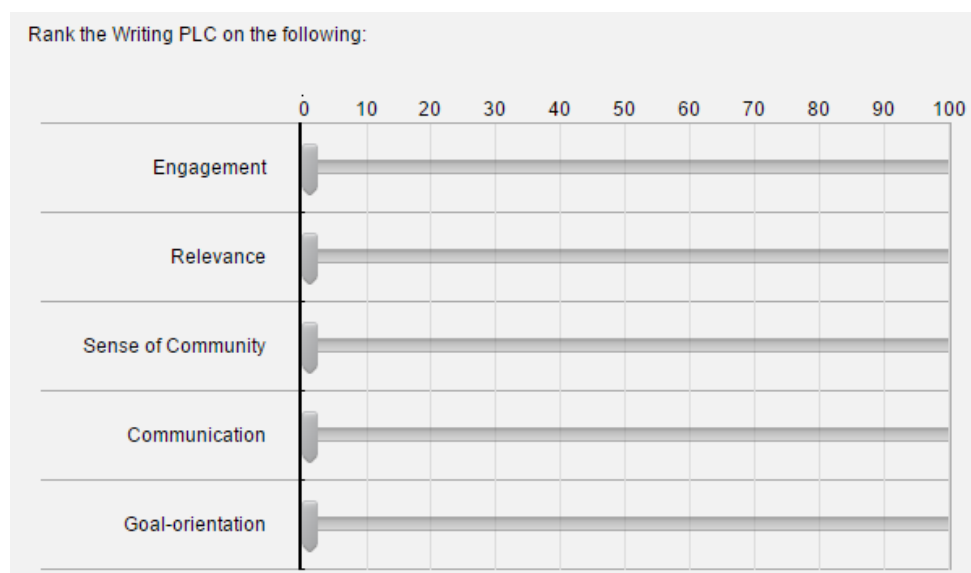


Figure 2. Participant Slider Scale Survey.

The first implementation asked participants to score their experience with professional learning opportunities that they had experienced in each of the categories; the two subsequent surveys asked them to score the writing PLC in which they were participating

for this survey. With each survey, participants were given the following definitions for each category on the survey.

- Engagement: the extent to which the professional learning through some means makes you feel interested and involved.
- Relevance: the extent to which the content of the professional learning is related to your teaching.
- Sense of community: the extent to which the professional learning created a space where colleagues felt welcomed, included in group decision-making, and able to share and challenge ideas.
- Communication: the extent to which educators in the professional learning community were encouraged to and/or chose to talk with one another about the content of the professional learning.
- Goal-orientation: the extent to which the professional learning made clear the expectations for outcomes.

This survey attempted to address the sub research question concerning the change of language use of the participatory action research learning community. In conjunction with the discourse analysis, this instrument resulted in data that led to rich analysis in the change over time with regard to participant perspectives.

Focus group discussions. This meeting took place after the last learning community meeting and was recorded with a voice recorder only. Participant insights proved useful in supporting findings from data analysis of transcripts. This focus group had two purposes namely 1) to provide educators with a qualitative opportunity to reflect on the learning community process and 2) to support the findings from data analysis through member checking. I first asked participants to simply reflect aloud about the group. I also shared with participants my thoughts and the findings that resulted from

transcript analysis and slider scale survey results. In this way, the focus group served as a data collection opportunity and member checking, particularly of early analysis coding systems. Additionally, the educators in this focus group provided insight about why some of the patterns that were emerging in the discourse analysis and coding had come about. For example, some participants were able to explain why they had expressed negativity toward the county policies regarding writing instruction. The reflection process can be important to understanding participant sense of community development (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013) as well as making explicit the individual meaning making of interactions taking place (Gee, 2014; Vasconcelos, 2013). Data collected from the focus group did not directly respond to the research questions; rather, it debriefed the process in a way that participants could clarify and provide context.

Data Analysis

This case study examined how educators used language to construct knowledge about teaching writing in a PAR PLC. I was able to use what I had learned about teacher talk in learning communities from the pilot study of this dissertation as well as initial readings of transcripts from this study to help formulate codes. Those initial readings focused on noticing instances where speakers used exploratory talk (Mercer, 2000) to construct knowledge, though further analysis expounded on those instances as language features. Those codes were useful in deepening analysis of the educators' language through discourse analysis. This method allowed me to create more robust sets of codes to understand teacher talk in the PAR PLC. Coding is an effective means of analyzing qualitative data, particularly when that coding can be refined through several sources of

data (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In this study, I first developed a set of codes based on patterns I saw in the transcripts, comparing those patterns to what I saw in the pilot study. Then, I used those codes, based on the interactions of participants, to further develop a more detailed set of language features to describe the teacher talk toward construction of knowledge. These codes and language features are key to the discourse analysis of the transcripts. The slider scale surveys served to bolster the exploration of the language when held in discussion with the discourse analysis of transcripts, particularly as it pertained to the participant perspectives of the implementation of the professional learning community. The following sections discuss the methodological approaches I took to the discourse analysis of transcripts and analysis of survey results.

Discourse Analysis

I used discourse analysis to respond to the research questions in a pragmatic way. Discourse analysis situates itself at the relationship between the use, structure, and meaning of language, or, as Gee (2014) puts it, saying, doing and being. Discourse analysis has grown from a combined theory of anthropology, sociology, philosophy, and linguistics (Schiffrin, 1994). Mercer (2000) coalesces much of what is at the heart of discourse analysis through an explanation of the need to understand the communicative intelligence through which people make sense and plan. Additionally, Mercer (2000) asserts that because language creates knowledge, it also allows us to form unique partnerships with one another based upon the meanings we make. In this way, Mercer asserts that interactions in communication can be divided into certain types of talk. While

Mercer speaks of language more generally, Gee (2014) directly places this perspective into the practice of discourse analysis when he asserts that language “is part of the way we build and sustain our world, cultures, and institutions” (p. 10). This is why we must analyze language to understand humanity through research; discourse analysis is merely a vehicle for that.

Discourse analysis was born of a variety of fields and finds use in an array of research. The first linguist to use the term discourse analysis, Harris (1951), took the evolving term “discourse” and assigned a methodology of analysis to examine what he saw as a structure to language use going beyond the grammatical. Harris (1951), being a structural linguist, focused on language in terms of units, particularly the morpheme, as determining sound meaning correspondence within analyses. Work with discourse analysis since has expanded upon this. Stubbs (1983) defined discourse as language beyond what is read or heard in the sentence; the units of analysis in discourse may be interpreted as making meaning beyond what is said. Chafe (1987) further argued that the units we might focus on are contingent on our personal biases; researchers and linguists may ascribe a very formal, grammar-centric unit to language that is actually very informal. The author suggested a more holistic focus taking into account underlying components of meaning.

A traditional view of discourse analysis would be this structuralist view; the more prevalent approaches in current research take structuralist thinking combined with a functionalist view akin to Chafe (1987). Rather than ascribe units to language, a functionalist view of discourse and discourse analysis examines language in use as a part

of society (Brown & Yule, 1983; Fairclough, 2003; Schiffrin, 1994). In this view, language should not be viewed as an independent system which might reveal something about society or culture, but rather a component of the society or culture which uses it (Foucault, 1977, 1999; Gee, 2011; van Dijk, 2001). Thus, a combined structuralist and functionalist approach requires a new unit of language to analyze. The commonly used units of analysis in discourse work are utterances. The content, style, and structure of text or talk toward a goal is referred to as an utterance (Bakhtin, 1986). Schiffrin (1994) simplifies this as “inherently contextualized language production” (p. 41). Bakhtin (1986) contends that there are not neutral utterances; each provides a link between language and life. An utterance is in fact a multi-part conception in discourse analysis made up of the content of the message and the social context from which it is being relayed (Wortham, 2001). This means that in analyzing communication for any purpose, a deep understanding of context and social interplay is necessary. By communicating, people form partnerships called speech communities. Speech communities are identified by their shared language use (Gumperz, 1982). In looking at discourse analysis, it is necessary to understand how people generate new knowledge together and also how individuals make meaning for themselves. Discourse analysis differentiates between a general definition of a concept, such as can be found online or in dictionaries, and the situated meaning which is constructed wholly in context, and may not be comprehensible to another except the individual or speech community (Schiffrin, 1994; Gee, 2014). Thus, discourse analysis provides a very efficient vehicle for this study to analyze the talk of a community, the

PAR PLC on writing instruction, in order to discuss how educators construct knowledge together about the teaching of writing.

The discourse analysis in this study draws inspiration from Gumperz's (1982) conception of speech communities, Hymes' (1994) ethnographies of communication, and Mercer's (1995, 2000) categories of talk types. The coding of data was heavily informed by this statement from Gumperz (1982), "Only when a move has elicited a response can we say communication is taking place" (p. 1). In other words, utterances in communities only hold meaning insofar as they communicate perspectives to others and those others respond in kind. This creates a *speech community* whereby participants commit communication acts that can be analyzed on the interactional level. Hymes' (1994) ethnographies of communication add to this idea of speech communities by applying an anthropological perspective to the analysis of the sociolinguistic concept. In particular, ethnographies of communication trouble the ways in which participants in speech communities learn the language of the community and make meaning of language acts together.

Mercer's theories of categories of talk and talk types (1995, 2000) build upon this concept by providing a means to consider the discourse of participants in speech communities by assigning a purposeful code to the utterances. In its simplest form, Mercer poses three categories namely disputational, cumulative, and exploratory. Disputational talk is when the environment tends to be more competitive than collaborative and the language focuses more toward argument and disagreement than construction of ideas. Cumulative talk, on the other hand, happens when everyone agrees

with one another and shares ideas void of criticality. Exploratory talk is where speakers share, listen, critique, and question toward constructing knowledge through discourse. These categories can be assigned to utterances in a discourse to begin the process of discussing how participants interact, for what reasons they interact, and how they make meaning of those interactions. In a study of teachers in a learning community examining research lessons together, Dudley (2013) adapts Mercer's categories of talk to apply to and analyze the language used by participants in the study. The researcher created what he called "interaction functions" that stemmed from each of the categories. Each speech community is unique; as such, by creating the unique set of codes based on Mercer's categories, Dudley was able to achieve a rich description of the language of the speech community while also grounding those interaction functions in theory. The findings of this study suggested to Dudley that teacher collaboration in the group improved confidence to use research and conduct research by providing a space to rehearse ideas with low-stakes. The researcher also cites Mercer's interthinking (1995), which postulates that exploratory talk contributes to the creation of ideas where perspectives meet. Dudley explicitly remarks on the utility of interaction-level discourse analysis for refracting teacher talk into a medium ripe for discussion and analysis to better improve teacher learning. The data analysis in this study elaborates upon that idea. In order to better explain the process of how I conducted the analysis of the language in this study, it is best to think of it in three phases.

Phase one. In phase one, I took the recorded meetings and transcribed them myself. The choices that researchers make in transcription are theory laden, meaning that

how a transcript is prepared and what is included should rely on the framework and purposes guiding the research and, as such, it can constrain or strengthen data analysis (Gee, 2014; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999). Thus, transcription served as a refresher of the meetings that I took part in as well as an opportunity to take notes on themes that emerged. Coupled with my field notes, this was a good opportunity to begin looking for some common themes and interactions within the community that indicated construction of knowledge. I looked for instances where participants used exploratory talk to reach new understanding; later analysis delved deeper into what surrounded or led to that exploratory talk. At that point the analysis, I had only noted instances of exploratory talk. Once transcripts were completed, I began a more strategic analysis of the vast amounts of language used across fourteen, hour and a half long meetings. I used NVivo software to help find frequently used terminology and visualize the language structures being used. I used this to help situate some of my early coding around exploratory talk to understand how frequently talk led to construction of knowledge and began to note what did and did not lead to that end.

To begin a daunting task like making meaning out of such a large sample of language use, a subdivision of the data had to occur. The unit of analysis of this study is thematic by interaction type; thus, the units tended to be clause or sentence level. Those initial themes focused on how exploratory talk was reached or what stopped it. They included “new knowledge,” “sharing,” “reflection,” “argument,” “uncertainty,” “questioning,” “avoidance,” and “questioning.” I based the names for these codes off of my own understanding of what the speakers were trying to accomplish. For the purposes

of this study, I first developed working definitions for these types of interaction that took place in reading the transcripts. After drawing inspiration from Mercer's categories of talk to include not only exploratory but also disputational and cumulative (1995) and several read-throughs of transcripts, I was able to condense those definitions down into four basic categories of interaction, or modes of intercommunication. The naming of this set of codes was purposeful. The term "mode" denotes a system or pattern of occurrence; that is an important aspect in having a set of codes as they belie regularity and frequency. Also, as these four codes were quite broad, a systematic term like mode made more sense than a more specific term like "characteristic" or "feature." Next, the term "intercommunication" came about by accident, yet it has implications for the meanings of the coding system. As I was typing "interaction" during the coding of transcripts, I accidentally paused for a moment only to come back and begin another thought. The result was the word "intercommunication" typed across my screen, yet it was not corrected. After looking for the definition, I found that intercommunication meant mutual communication. I felt that this better described the dynamic nature of what participants were doing with language than the words "interaction" or "talk", which can be rather unilateral. A person can interact or talk with a rock, but he cannot intercommunicate with it. Thus, the term "modes of intercommunication" was born. These four modes of intercommunication are conveying knowledge, asking questions, challenging ideas, and expressing affirmation. After sharing these with the learning community via email, they agreed with the caveat that a more complex description would eventually be needed. Then, I was able to code the meeting transcripts according to those categories. I have

discussed these modes at length in the analysis section of this manuscript. While these are broad, encompassing labels, the discourse analysis more deeply considers the language features within these modes of intercommunication to get at how teachers talk to construct knowledge.

Phase two. In phase two of data analysis, I sought to refine my coding system to respond to the interactions I was seeing around the construction of knowledge (or not) during the teacher talk. The language that participants use is underscored by certain sociocultural meaning making and on-going discourses in the field of teaching. Proactive design theory presupposes that there is a purpose, or purposes, to the ways in which people speak or write (Gee, 2014). This means that patterns should emerge which can be critically examined as they pertain to my research questions. After coding the transcripts by the four modes of interaction, I did a more concise breakdown of each mode by language features that indicated construction of knowledge between educators based upon a close reading by both myself and follow-up readings of excerpts with the teachers in the learning community. These features were influenced by Mercer's interthinking (1995) which discusses the use of certain types of talk in the construction of ideas. For example, in the conveying knowledge mode of intercommunication, patterns arose which allowed me to divide the function of how participants used the conveyance of knowledge to construct ideas; this resulted in the terms "reimagining" and "sharing experience" respectively. Specifically, those patterns emerged based upon my interpretations of the purposes of the utterances.

Not all talk in the transcripts were coded, but if I could tell that the speaker seemed to want to convey knowledge, I tried to further understand what type of knowledge they wanted to convey. In instances of reimagining, the teachers in the PAR PLC would take an idea and relate it as something new. In sharing experience, they related using past tense something they had read or done. In that way, I was able to refine each mode of intercommunication based upon the purposes of talk toward constructing knowledge or not. In every instance of coded language from transcripts, the prevailing question during this second phase of analysis was, “how does this indicate that the speakers were constructing knowledge or failing to do so?” Some coded examples of transcripts were shared with the learning community members and their feedback was essential in the development of the final coding framework. For example, these eight language features allowed me a way to understand differences in how language was used in each mode to construct knowledge. For example, at first challenge seemed to be simple; however, deeper reading revealed the purposes behind the challenge made a difference in the way participants constructed knowledge. Refutation as a mode of challenge occurred when the speaker offered a counter-example or denied the efficacy of some idea. I noticed that some challenge did not only refute ideas, but the speaker as well. These I coded as repositioning as the utterances in that way seemed to try to place one person below another in importance. Affirmation was also furthered in a similar way. Initially, it seemed as if simple agreement would be coded as affirmation; however, closer look at the reactions of speakers to affirmation showed differences. Relating supporting affirmation occurred when direct support was offered for something

conveyed. Sometimes affirmation was terse, did not expound, or seemed like it ended a conversation. This often looked like an uncomfortable speaker trying to change the topic. Last, asking questions was a more clear-cut division for me. Questions about the factual, logistical nature of something that was said I deemed attempts to clarify, which was important to teachers understanding one another. On the other hand, questions that wanted more information about the conception of ideas and their implementation I coded as discussion. Those questions seemed to call for more than just the speaker who shared the idea to respond. These language features also give me a way to express more clearly the themes that emerged through discourse analysis. Table 2 expresses the relationship of the modes and language features.

Table 2

Modes of Interaction Codes Broken Down by Language Features

Interaction breakdown by category	
Conveying Knowledge	Reimagining
	Sharing Experience
Expressing Affirmation	Relating-supporting
	Acquiescing
Asking Questions	Clarifying
	Discussing
Challenging Ideas	Repositioning
	Refuting

This is a simplification of very complex transactions of language that occurred between educators in the learning community. They aid in the storytelling process about

the teacher talk. These language features are very much interrelated with one another. During analysis, I did not take each of these language features in isolation; rather, I see them as part of the flow of language that took place during learning community meetings toward certain purposes, either constructing knowledge or not. These language features detail the purpose of an utterance. In looking at what follows an utterance, an understanding of participant language interaction can be explored. For example, conveying knowledge might result in a refutation which then leads to a discussion and then reimagining. That result is a different function than a discussion followed by refutation and clarifying before coming to an acquiescence. These codes allow for a discussion of the varied transactions that take place within the broader modes of intercommunication. The talk amongst educators in the learning community tells the story of how they constructed knowledge or not and how that process develops and changes as educators interact. This phase responds directly to the primary research question.

Phase three. This final phase addresses the sub research question concerning how language use in the PAR PLC changed over time. This phase uses both the analysis of talk, the coding and discourse analysis, and the slider-scale surveys that participants completed three times throughout the term of the PAR PLC meetings. The discourse analysis most directly informed this question. I was able to analyze the patterns of language by the frequency of use of the modes of intercommunication at different points in the PAR PLC meetings. In other words, certain modes of intercommunication were more prevalent in the initial, middle, and later meetings. The nature of the use of

language features to construct knowledge or not also changed; the findings of this analysis is described in later sections through detailed descriptions of the teacher talk at different stages of the PAR PLC in order to draw comparisons and contrasts toward understanding the changes that occurred. In order to contextualize if and how these changes in language use occurred, the slider-scale surveys provided insight into the participating educators' perspectives of the learning community.

The surveys themselves did not serve as part of the discourse analysis. The resulting data serve best to help explain the perspectives of participants. As a part of this research study is to understand how collaborations and disengagements changed over time in this learning community on writing, the opportunity to discuss the positions and perspectives of educators as it relates to the learning community as a whole is valuable. The components of the slider-scale survey, while not a perfect instrument to measure the confidence of the educators in the learning community, do provide a way to discuss how their conceptions of the community in different ways shifts as the speech community changes and the community of practice develops. The surveys especially provide a means to better discuss participant perspectives pertaining to past experience with professional learning; this showcases the development of this learning community even better. In this analysis, I have shown the results of the surveys and analyzed ways in which their perspectives might be reflected in their language use by holding the survey results next to the discourse analysis. In this way, the story of the greater context of participant perspectives of professional learning can help to understand learning community changes over time.

Trustworthiness

It is necessary to briefly discuss potential issues related to the viability of the design and potential results of this dissertation research. Participatory action research is very much engaged in the idea of trustworthiness in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stringer, 2007). Rather than the more rigid conception of validity and reliability in quantitative analysis, trustworthiness, a qualitative validity, is comprised of four main necessities for a study, 1) credibility, or the integrity of the study, 2) transferability, or the general concept that the study does have a relationship to some context not of the study, 3) dependability, or the development of clear defined research procedures, and 4) confirmability, or the ability to prove that the study took place as described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For action research, this means becoming very involved in the event being studied with regular member checking, debriefing, use of diverse and multiple sources of data, or triangulation, and auditing of findings by all participants (Stringer, 2007). The bulk of the validation comes from working with educators to make sure the analysis of what was observed holds weight, but the responsibility for bringing the situated findings to be held up against larger societal structures falls to the researcher role (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Any PAR study with participant observer ideologies, exists in the delicate balance between researcher and participant. The participant observer role for the researcher is crucial to the aims of PAR as there must be a reciprocity between the study, the participants, the researcher, and society, with none isolated from the other, in order to assign meaning to the findings (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). The challenges to trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985)

raised through the use of participant observer roles of PAR can be accounted for with diligent processes in the design of the study (Locke, Alcorn, & O'Neill, 2013; Stringer, 2007). Additionally, as this is a qualitative case study, Maxwell (2012) cautions the careful preparation against two types of validity threats, researcher bias and reactivity. Researcher bias refers to the preconceptions and notions held by the researcher. Reactivity is the influence that the researcher has on the research site and participants by being present.

In order to address these issues, careful steps were necessary throughout the research process. First, I have been forthcoming about my own biases and positions coming into the research and in writing this manuscript. Reporting bias is key as removing bias is not possible. Next, I was involved with the study for many weeks and took on the role of participant observer. This role granted me insights into the workings of the community that I might not have had with less time or less emersion. The research questions were made available to the participating educators, and they were heavily involved in the process of creating the community and member checking the findings. I wanted to check that what I was inferring is what people were meaning to say. Additionally, the intervention, action-orientation stance from the outset of the study presents a protection against validity threats as it supported claims made in the findings. A triangulation of data, or using multiple points of data collection to compare results, was established with the use of a three phase design and focus group. Along these lines, the use of frequency counts throughout the discourse analysis adds to the richness of data, as does the comparison of this study to others like it and the pilot study I conducted prior. In

terms of my role as a participant observer, Maxwell (2012) contends that it does not generally pose a threat to validity. Lastly, by sharing the findings and discussing ways that the participating educators in this study used language to construct knowledge or not, I invite readers to draw their own conclusions through perusal of the findings. Overall, a clearly explicit approach to this dissertation research, one where communication flows openly between researcher and participants and that line is not so divisive, helped to quell threats to validity.

Positionality

I hope to clearly relate my own position in this research in order to strengthen my findings and trustworthiness. Certain potential ethical dilemmas are inherent in most research studies. For myself, one of the most difficult positions in this regard was that I am a former teacher at the site where this dissertation research was conducted. That has helped in my transition into working with this group of teachers, yet it also complicated the data collection and analysis. I had worked with two educators in the pilot to this study; however, by the start of this dissertation data collection, I was familiar with half of the learning community and a stranger to the other. It is important to acknowledge my biases in this regard as I have attempted to view this community as both an insider and an outsider using multiple perspectives for analysis. In regard to my own purpose of being at the school at all, I was drawn to this study through the administrator at this school, who knew about my teaching personally, and the teachers' desires to improve writing instruction through a professional learning community; however, I was also driven by my desire to leave a mark on the school where I had once been an important fixture. My

personal stake in the positive outcome of the learning community had an impact on my designs in this study. I worked with the teachers in the pilot study to develop and test a means of professional learning that might make a difference in their writing instruction. I wanted the community to succeed as a participant and as a former teacher; this means my setup of the framework for data collection and the analysis focused more on the successes than the failures. We would all call the PAR PLC a success; each teacher involved reported that during the focus group discussion at the end. This fact is also marked by the fact that we still meet, albeit less than before due to my own time constraints. As a researcher, I tried to take an outsider perspective and look for issues in the talk; I found those and used them in the analysis, but I have to wonder at the interpretations others might have had who were not as involved.

My position as a researcher and, what my former administrator, Fran, advertised me as to the group, an “expert on writing” created some difficulties. In any meeting environment, it is possible for the researcher to overstep bounds and take on too strong a leadership role rather than collecting data, observing, and participating in an equitable way. I may have done this at the first meeting in response to the others’ uncertainty in order to try and get a better outcome. I talked too much in the early meetings; when it seemed like the others were not engaging one another in discussions, I took it upon myself to try and add to ideas or generate conversation. In those first two meetings, I was the one who brought in my experiences and the research I had done rather than passing that responsibility around as it happened in later meetings. The PAR design for the learning community helped to remind all participants, myself included, to be affirming of

multiple worldviews and sociocultural differences while allowing for sharing of beliefs from all participants. In other words, I had to constantly remind myself that the PAR PLC design we kept talking about meant that the community had to develop a way to talk and create and act rather than me spawning it for everyone else. This took time to develop, though my early talk might have served as a model for sharing experiences in later meetings. Negotiating multiple roles was a challenge.

The greatest dilemma I had might have been the role of both participant and researcher. It was very difficult to both observe and participate. I addressed this by being explicit about my roles and the purposes of those roles with participants. They knew I was studying language, and they helped me to understand their talk as I analyzed it. They also knew I wanted to help them to improve writing instruction, and that the purpose of the PAR PLC was to meet that need first. Also, videotaping meetings allowed me to focus on participation in the PLC. After the meetings, I was able to review the video and take field notes from a researcher point of view. To ensure that inferential trustworthiness was maintained, I employed member checking, whereby all educators in the study had the opportunity to hear about and look over my findings and inferences, and everyone was well aware of the design of the community we were using. Generally speaking, I had to be aware of and tell all the other educators about my bias to make sure that I took into account my purposes in conducting this research and carrying it out honestly and with the needs of the research site in mind. It also meant that as a white, male, highly educated, liberal, experienced teacher, I came in with biases that had to be balanced against trying to engage in learning and discussion of the research questions at the heart of this study.

As a former department chair, the desire to take control at some lulling moments in the PAR PLC was powerful. Additionally, as a researcher, it would have been simple to become the font of knowledge and the savior of writing for those teachers, but that would have been both dishonest and not nearly as effective as what transpired when I sat back and participated instead of taking control. I found it much more manageable to be a former colleague, a stranger, a teacher, a researcher, and a participant in professional learning when I told everyone in the PAR PLC that I was all of those things. In that way, we worked together to conduct the learning community, and they helped me to ground myself as I analyzed the talk.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The focus of this study is on the interactions of educators within the unique context of a participatory action research learning community focused on the teaching of writing. In order to better understand these interactions, the primary concern of analysis is the language used by the teachers and myself throughout our meetings. The sole research question driving this investigation is as follows: how do educators use language to construct knowledge (or not) about writing instruction in a participatory action research learning community on writing? Language is a key tool in collaboration and certain ways of using language can indicate community building; additionally, language can imply disengagement and division (Schiffrin, 1994; Gee, 2014). From a sociocultural perspective, language is a means for speakers to interact in such a way to understand and question thereby constructing knowledge together through discourse (Mercer, 1995). In order to add a deeper contextual understanding of the development of this community, I have included the following research question: how does participant language use change over the course of time in this learning community about writing? To illustrate the findings of this study, I first provide language profiles based on the coding of transcripts to help in the description of the discussions the learning community had. Next, I present the discourse analysis using the interaction-level coding presented in the methods section.

Several exemplar excerpts of coded transcripts have been presented to develop the description of the process and further the analysis of participant construction of knowledge across meetings. Last, the survey data is presented to help show shifts in participant perspectives in light of the language shifts seen in the discourse analysis. Findings suggest that educators in this PAR PLC changed their language use over time in as they formulated ways of constructing knowledge together about the teaching of writing.

How Do Educators Use Language to Collaborate or Disengage in This Participatory Action Research Learning Community on Writing?

Language Profiles

To understand how educators used language to construct knowledge about writing instruction in the PLC discussions, I endeavored to understand the linguistic patterns of each participant. Here I have compiled language feature profiles for each participant individually to better tell the story of the group through a look at their interactions. The language features in these profiles are mentioned in the methods section of this manuscript as well as later in this analysis; however, the importance here of these profiles is to frame the following analysis with a better understanding of how these language features relate to what transpired in these meetings. The language features that were used the most by individuals in this study not only helped to understand individual perspectives, but also helped to further elaborate on the group interactions. Additionally, it is quite difficult to get a grasp of the unique features and perspectives provided by every participant if individual contribution is not fully considered. Each participant in this

study brings forward a unique worldview and multiple identities outside the context of the learning community.

Gabe. “Just breathe; relax. We’re listening to what you’re saying. I know how it feels to be new.” The most predominant feature of Gabe’s talk throughout meetings was relating-supporting affirmation. He loves to tell stories about himself and stories about his students. As people contributed ideas, Gabe could be counted on to offer up an example or counter-example to them. Being a part of the pilot study prior to this group, he took a much shorter amount of time to develop a sense of how to promote discussion through questioning. Gabe was the least likely to directly refute what someone else was saying, preferring instead to continue the discussion toward consensus. His most evident development from beginning to end in the group was in his ability to synthesize ideas people were sharing and discover opportunities for himself to improve his practice through making them work in his classroom.

Luther. “What would it have been like if we’d have been meeting about this all along?” Not one to waste words, Luther’s most frequent contribution to the group was generating discussion through thoughtful, theoretical, and often terse questions. He preferred to stay quiet until most people shared their perspective. When not promoting conversation toward new directions, Luther offered relating-supporting affirmation, again, at the end of topics and provided insight into how he envisioned using strategies discussed during meetings. Luther, perhaps, used an overabundance of opportunities to further discussion rather than offering up knowledge, which was rare.

Leslie. “I think it’s just great what you’re doing. That reminds me of something I used to do with my students.” As the most experienced teacher in the learning community, Leslie always had a lot to share. For many ideas, she had tried or had seen them tried in some way. In early meetings, Leslie dominated talking time above all other educators, though her anecdotes were relevant to the topic at hand. Her sharing modeled and helped to create a safer environment for sharing other perspectives. As more people took on more frequent speaking roles, she began asking questions, particularly clarifying. Additionally, perhaps due to her experience, Leslie had a habit of repositioning people and ideas to fit into her conception of teaching and school life; however, she noted during the focus group how nice it was to experience multiple perspectives and get to talk about them in a meaningful, direct way.

Angela. “If you just trust the process, it’s going to help you; I promise. You may not think you need to talk about this stuff, but we do.” Probably the biggest proponent to the learning community, Angela helped recruit many of the other educators. She took part in the pilot study and felt confident and comfortable in the participatory action research learning community model. She noted early on a reluctance to dominate the conversation; however, she did end up taking a leadership role to promote sharing of ideas from the others. As a result, Angela shared knowledge more than any other language feature, and she modeled it for others being sure to add in questions that would help to generate discussion about her ideas. While Angela was likely to challenge ideas directly, another of her predominant language features was repositioning. As she puts it, her goal in the learning community is making all the ideas work for writing in her classroom. For her,

that meant vocalizing her dissent by putting ideas into categories apart from herself, particularly ideas from those of less experience. According to Angela, this was not out of disrespect but rather for her own knowledge of what she felt would not work and why.

Fran. “You all know I’ve got a strong opinion about everything, but it’s good to know I’m not the only one.” The administrator of the school, Fran, felt most comfortable with expressing her disagreement with statements made by other educators. Having been a part of the pilot study, Fran tended to be aware of the impact she could have as a supervisor over the teachers taking part. As a result, she tempered her refutation, instead opting to offer up discussion about topics, though usually in such a way to make a point that was more in line with her positions. Additionally, due to twenty-eight years of experience in education, Fran offered points of insight from her own experiences through sharing her experiences. Operating from a position of power created a difficult situation for Fran within a learning community context where voices were supposed to be considered with equity. As someone who is used to having the last word in the school, she reported finding it relaxing to be able to have frank conversations with less guarded language from the teachers than she was used to.

Alfred. “I just don’t think that’ll work; I mean, I think we can make it work, though.” As a former baseball coach, Alfred had no problem in telling educators exactly what he thought. He preferred to offer up questions for discussion in response to ideas he seemed to think might not work. This, in combination with his knack for refutation of ideas he disagreed with, made him an excellent test for any idea that came up in the group. His thoughtful consideration built up ideas and helped to refine them.

Additionally, he strongly offered support for ideas he agreed with, had used before, or became convinced of. Alfred was not a member of the pilot study, so his forceful opinions brought about some disengagement and non-starters, instances of abruptly ended conversation, in earlier meetings before, as he puts it, he “learned to shut up and listen.”

Ali. “I barely know which direction I’m going some days, so I appreciate all these ideas and support.” One of two first year teachers in the learning community, Ali did not bring in a wealth of experiential notions of what a learning community should be. Very quiet throughout the first few meetings, she eventually became a supporting voice for ideas, relying on theory to explain herself. Initially, most of her contributions were clarifying questions, but as her confidence grew so too did she fall into the support role. In later meetings, Ali tended to focus on reimagining ideas for her classroom after supporting it. She was very timid about conveying knowledge until those later meetings, which serves as a testament to her professional growth and the support of confidence nurtured in the learning community.

Cass. “I know I ask a ton of questions, and y’all are probably tired of it, but I would rather understand than be lost in the dark without a candle.” Another new teacher, Cass also had to grow into a role with the learning community from a timid beginning. Early meetings involved almost nothing but silence and clarifying questions from her; however, urging from Angela and some confidence boosting from discussion of some of her classroom strategies for writing she shared brought her into the fold as she took on a larger speaking and sharing role in the group. A majority of her talk, like Ali’s, was

relating-supporting. With little experience of teaching to share, she relied on supporting ideas she thought sounded effective. In later meetings, she consistently shared strategies she was using in her class to get feedback and further develop them. This became almost ritualistic in meetings as she employed the learning community as her testing ground for new ideas.

Martin. “I think we need to bring this back around to what will be best for students. How are they going to use this?” The only non-native English speaker and foreign language teacher of the group, Martin offered up unique ideas for discussion through his perspective. He often turned ideas on their heads by posing what-if scenarios and considering multiple perspectives of student takes on issues at hand. He reminded educators about emergent bilinguals in English and how writing might be not only a language challenge but also a cultural one. Additionally, as a teacher of seven years, Martin had plenty of experiential knowledge to share about teaching. Martin’s pleasant demeanor manifested in his infectious support for ideas, which garnered smiles more often than not. Only in later meetings did Martin feel comfortable with direct refutation, and he did not do it often. He preferred instead to let discussion guide the learning community toward the generation of solutions. In that way, he also consistently reminded the whole group to be mindful of being solution-oriented rather than focusing too much on problems. His consistently hopeful language use had a positive impact on intercommunication.

Patrick. “I really appreciate what you said about writing being an individualized process that we try to standardize. What do the rest of you think about that?” This is me.

As a researcher-participant, I faced several challenges in my own language use. As previously mentioned, other educators wanted to look to me for guidance and knowledge in early meetings. Knowing the conception for participatory action research and the tenets I felt were important for a learning community designed after it, I had to find a way to step away from that role. My most predominant language feature was in conveying knowledge. Early meetings were rife with this as I talked about data collection strategies and examples of teaching and research about writing. When other educators started taking on more frequent speaking roles, I was able to sink into a more natural state for myself. In my case, that meant relating-supporting by using my own teaching and research experiences and generating discussion through questioning and problematizing ideas. I love analogies, so I had a habit of trying to create them in order to synthesize complex ideas at the end of our discussions. I feel that I negotiated the role of participant-researcher as well as possible, aided and hindered by the fact that I had previously worked at the school participating in the study. The design of the learning community and the language environment created by the educators through interaction contributed to my positive labors.

The community. While not a participant of itself, the community is an important character in telling the story of this PAR PLC. Participatory action research is a cooperative endeavor (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000). As a result, I was not the creator of the community as much as I was the catalyst for getting everyone together. At our first meeting, we shared goals for what we wanted to accomplish. These were shaped the more we met, but those initial goals drove how we

would formulate meetings. For instance, it was decided in that first meeting that everyone should have the opportunity to share data related to writing instruction goals throughout the meetings. In this way, we were a participatory community in mindset early on. The first two meetings had a business meeting-like atmosphere with an organized, circular seating arrangement and some educators wearing dour expressions. Later, some educators even admitted to dread at the idea of attending the meetings. The structure of meetings took better shape as we practiced. We would typically start the meeting with any burning, important comments someone might have in mind. Then, another participant would share their data; sometimes this would be observations from their classroom related to writing instruction, student writing samples, student comments collected through survey or informal interview, or anything that provided insight. The group would then analyze this information through discussion. As we all became more adept at this process, we talked more about taking action and creating plans toward improvement; not in a general way, but rather using evidence and data to guide decision-making. Usually, a few people would share their experiences or issues they were having with student writing. There were a few on-going topics like learning-to-write versus writing-to-learn, assignment design, and handwriting versus digital that would create an on-going community discourse. Meetings always ended with reflection through a discussion of next steps. In this we decided who would lead-off the sharing the next week, if there were any key topics to study for next time, and any actions that needed to occur. The process developed as we met and several aspects played into that.

There were some mitigating factors related to the context of teaching in this community. Politics played a good bit into the group. At times, all educators, first year all the way to twenty-eight years in education, seemed to refute otherwise good ideas noting that “they” or “the powers that be” or “central office” would never let it stand. The following utterance of frustration by Alfred from the ninth meeting is an example of political sway among the learning community’s practices.

Alfred: We can’t just (throws his hands up) get rid of a bunch of grades. Parents expect at least one grade a week, and central office sure expects one or two. They’re not going to be happy with us messing around with grades. [refutation]

This was part of a larger conversation over many meetings about cutting back on grades to support student motivation in writing. Several discussions were held, but it never got past the initiation stage before someone said that some group in power expected grades. The imagined or real political forces held sway even where they weren’t present; there was even what I would describe as a language of fear. Alfred exhibited that fear in his talk above; he clearly worried for the consequences that could befall anyone braving the endeavor of changing grading practices. His refutation promoted upholding the current standard rather than problematizing the issue and collaborating with colleagues in the group about solutions. This political control created disengagement by ending discussions. When asked about this in the focus group, a participant had this to say, “From day one in your teaching career, you get constant reminders of who is in charge and where the line is that you don’t cross with regard to who holds all the cards.” Thus, the talk was controlled at times by forces not even present in the room where the learning

community was held. Though collaboration overcame many obstacles as educators interacted, there were some deep-seeded facets of teacher- and school-lives that still had an impeding impact.

Despite some of the contextual politics, however, a supportive community formed. As time passed, educators excitedly exchanged emails ahead of meetings and inside jokes had emerged, increasing the levity. The seating was still mostly circular, but far less uniform and not with everyone facing an imaginary center. With the comfort of familiarity and knowledge of process both developed through time and practice, ideas were not just handed back and forth between educators, rather, they bounced around the room becoming something different with each touch from a speaker. We always began with at least one person, but usually more, sharing some practice or idea that we had discussed in the last meeting. Earlier meetings seemed marked by a fear of failure, but the community ended up providing a testing ground for ideas and reflections. When people shared, other educators listened and always had something to say, disagreement, agreement or otherwise. We discussed theory, definitions, students, strategies, and more, but it all came back around to testing and improving practice. We developed the idea for redrafting a writing plan to meet school improvement plan needs, but we also developed personal goals for improving instruction. We each became familiar with others goals and referenced them directly in feedback. In these ways, all the educators in this learning community on writing constructed knowledge together through talk. The community became more than the sum of its parts; the interactions built concepts and practices we could not have conceived of alone.

Modes of Intercommunication

Data from the study suggests that educators used language to construct knowledge in the learning community by using the following modes of intercommunication (a) conveying knowledge, (b) expressing affirmation, (c) asking questions, and (d) challenging ideas. Within those four modes of intercommunication are eight language features, two from each mode. Table 3 is a flowchart, which exhibits this movement from modes to language features.

Table 3
Interaction Breakdown by Category

Conveying Knowledge	Reimagining
	Sharing Experience
Expressing Affirmation	Relating-supporting
	Acquiescing
Asking Questions	Clarifying
	Discussing
Challenging Ideas	Repositioning
	Refuting

The division of each mode into language features is significant because there were stark differences in the ways in which educators used each mode to construct knowledge. Each language feature provides a more detailed way to express how educators used talk to construct knowledge within each mode of intercommunication. Table 4 explains each code, defines it, and provides an example of talk directly from learning community transcripts.

Table 4

Language Feature Codes for Transcript Analysis with Definitions

Code	Definition	Exemplar
Reimagining	Providing a personal vision or concept for an idea.	Ali: I like to think I could take this (pause) into what I'm doing. I could-I'm going to make it work for math by making it (pause) about word problems.
Sharing Experience	Providing experiential knowledge.	Leslie: When I first started teaching (laughs), I remember my mentor-he would tell me to just put a big old, red "X" on a paper if it was late. (laughs) How silly!
Relating-Supporting	Explaining personal, supportive relationship with ideas.	Luther: I agree with what you're trying to get across. And I would add that (long pause) students do usually rise to expectations like that. I'm all about creating experiences (laughs) you know that.
Acquiescing	Allowing for an idea without an explanation of support or begrudgingly.	Fran: You've got to enforce it. Every day. (hits the table lightly) Cass: Why- Fran: I don't know another way-sorry. Cass: No, no. You're right.
Clarifying	Asking a question to clarifying meaning of another perspective.	Patrick: So you mean writing by choice instead of being forced?
Discussing	Posing a statement or question to further discussion.	Gabe: (long pause) What do you think would happen if we tried (pause) to get the other teachers to do writing portfolios?
Repositioning	Placing ideas or people into social or contextual	Angela: Well, (pause and looks at Cass) you're just saying that now because you're new. Just wait until you get a few years on you and then- (laughs)

	categories.	
Refuting	Direct disagreement about an idea.	Alfred: What if we just ask them- Fran: I'm going to go ahead and cut that off before it even starts. Can't do it, so won't do it.

The outcomes that result from these modes and language features were used to discuss the direction of construction of knowledge and note whether those directions changed throughout the meetings. While some of these features tend to promote construction of knowledge and others less so, none can be said to be wholly contributory to either exclusively. As the transcript excerpts throughout this analysis show, there are ways that educators used each language feature to both take part creating ideas and distance from one another. To better illustrate the four modes of intercommunication and corresponding language features and outcomes, I analyze representative excerpts from transcripts of the learning community for each mode where construction of knowledge is successful and others where it was not so successful.

Conveying knowledge. The conveyance of knowledge refers to the act of educators bringing in an experience or thought that adds new perspective, ideas, and/or experiences to the community. This mode of communication was a building block for constructing knowledge about the teaching of writing because members often shared experiences and provided a personal vision or concept for an idea. Thus, educators in the learning community used language to convey knowledge in several ways. Most often, an individual would offer an anecdote or experiential narrative to explain their thoughts on a topic. As a language feature, I coded these experiences as sharing experience. For

instance, it became typical for educators to bring in data collection they had done or research and informative articles they had encountered. In speaking about these mediums of knowledge with the group, educators sometimes took on a language denoting mastery of the topic they had read or analyzed; however, more often, the educators would offer new ideas to the group using an interrogative structure to their speaking. Where sharing knowledge often began conversations, reimagining became more common in the later parts of discussions. After ideas had been troubled through talk, educators would often offer up new conceptions of those shared ideas. In this process, educators constructed knowledge by first sharing experiences for the group to work with through talk before reimagining the ideas for different perspectives or uses. It should be noted that I differentiated conveying knowledge from other modes by the purpose of interaction; when educators chose to delve into ideas rather than just state them, that I might have coded as discussion or even refutation; if the purpose of talk was not to propose an idea in a factual way, I did not consider it conveying knowledge. The following excerpt represents an example of conveying knowledge in a way that constructs knowledge using shared experience and reimagining. Three teachers had a brief interaction during the seventh learning community meeting about students' writing preferences inside and outside of class. This was an ongoing topic across meetings, and it was not the first time anyone had brought it up in a meeting; it was, however, the first time it had been brought up that day where we had been discussing recent experiences with talking to students about writing.

Leslie: I've got students who just love to write. They write on their own every day; they just don't always like to write for class. [sharing experience]

Luther: Yeah, how do we use that interest? [discussing question]

Gabe: I start with letting them, uh, write what they like. That's learning to write like we were saying. Learning to write can be done in any context, so it doesn't matter what students choose to use. [reimagining]

In this excerpt, Leslie began by sharing an experience she had with students liking to write out of school, but not in school. Luther follows her comment with an open-ended discussion question how to utilize student interest in writing within academic contexts. Gabe then provides a personal vision for how he might handle it in his classroom (e.g., let them write what they like). Educators in this excerpt, then, conveyed knowledge by sharing experiences and reimagining ideas about what it means to teach writing in the content, an area in which students appear to resist. Specifically, by conveying what they know about teaching writing at this moment, they open opportunities to construct knowledge in ways that possibly reimagines the kind of writing they do in their classroom.

Although many times educators conveyed knowledge that led to the construction of new understandings about writing, sometimes those shared experiences and reimaginings did the opposite. For example, several transcripts illustrated that the sharing of knowledge led to non-starters (e.g., line of conversation that was not taken up by educators). Many times this occurred when educators were eager to share their knowledge about writing, which distracted from their ability to listen and respond to multiple ideas being shared. As a result, educators tended to affirm ideas and move to the

next topic without asking questions, sharing experiences, and/or reimagining. For example, the following excerpt took place during the first PLC meeting. During this conversation, two teachers, in an attempt to share knowledge about writing, explored possible solutions for dealing with students who resist and dislike writing.

Leslie: What can you do about hating writing, though? [discussion]

Gabe: The, uh, I mean, I try to get to know them and why they hate to do it, like, so much [experience]
and I-

Alfred: We all do stuff we hate, you just have got to do it at the end of the day no matter what, as a student [refutation],
so the issue isn't liking to do it but getting them to do it anyway, right?
[discussion]

Leslie: But I-

Gabe: I mean, yeah, I guess. [acquiescence]

In an attempt to share knowledge about writing, Leslie asked an open-ended discussion question about how to deal with students who disliked and resisted writing in the classroom. In response, Gabe conveyed his knowledge by sharing his experience that talking with students and understanding why they disliked writing could be a starting place to reaching resistant writers. Alfred builds on Gabe's experience and shares another perspective by saying that students do not necessarily need to like writing, but they need to know how to do it. He ends with an open-ended discussion question that Leslie attempts to take up but is interrupted by Gabe who acquiesces by saying, "I mean, yeah, I guess." At this point, sharing knowledge ceased. Thus, educators shared experiences in an attempt to construct knowledge about what it means to teach resistant writers. At first,

such talk appeared to build on each other's experiences, but was shut down after Alfred shared a new perspective that Gabe did not take up. As a result, the line of conversation was closed and they dropped the topic about how to motivate resistant writers. Thus, sharing experiences does not necessarily lead to the construction of knowledge. As this excerpt illustrates, educators must not only share experiences, but also listen to teach other's experiences and build on them.

The above excerpt can be held in contrast to the following excerpt from the eleventh meeting of the learning community where a flow of discussion arises from sharing experience about using writing portfolios and discussing learning goals for writing. Everyone in the learning community decided to make the use of writing portfolios a goal for their classrooms. After making it a goal, members continually refine the concept of writing portfolios through talk, as shown below.

Gabe: So, yeah, writing portfolios are going well.

Patrick: What's going well about them? [clarifying]

Gabe: Students are into it. They want to keep bringing stuff in to put in it and I'm like, no, just the stuff you think meets your learning goals. [experience]
What kind of learning goals are you all coming up with because we're still working- [discussion]

Leslie: We're not going as fast as you yet (laughs) but we have talked about learning goals. [relating supporting]

Gabe: Like what? [clarifying question]

Leslie: Well, like organizing paragraphs, for example. [relating supporting]

Cass: Is that a learning goal, though? It seems like just a topic. [refutation]

Alfred: Sure it is, you've got to have a major topic to have a goal or else you're just pointing out some of those useless goals we mentioned, right? [discussion]

Gabe: I get what she is saying, though. It's not specific enough. A big topic like that isn't specific enough. [refutation]
We would have a goal like organize your paragraphs by using transition sentences. [reimagining]

In the above transcript, Gabe conveys knowledge by sharing the experience that portfolios are going well so far in his classroom. Patrick then asks a clarifying question that prompts elaboration. Gabe then elaborates on his experience and poses an open-ended question about learning goals. Leslie attempts to address his question by sharing her own classroom experience of talking about the goals. Gabe asks her to elaborate and then Leslie does so by sharing her experience. Cass asks a question that refutes Leslie's example of a learning goal. Such a refutation attempts to clarify the meaning of a learning goal for writing instruction. Alfred defends Leslie's example by saying that they need a topic to have a goal, but then asks for clarification by posing, "Right?" Gabe builds on that discussion questions by hearing and validating Cass's comment ("I get what she is saying") and giving a specific example for why he disagrees with Leslie and Alfred ("It's not specific enough"). Gabe then reimagines what that topic might look like in his classroom if it were a learning goal. This excerpt is an example of educators conveying knowledge by sharing experiences and reimagining. Specifically, the combination of sharing experiences and reimagining was used to construct knowledge about how to do portfolios and create learning goals in the classroom. In particular, after Gabe shares his experience it spurs questions and comments related to that experience. Such conversation then led to Gabe's reimagining what learning goals would look like. Thus, conveying

knowledge in and of itself was not indicative of the construction of knowledge within this learning community about writing, nor was any other mode of intercommunication; rather, other features of language in conjunction with the shared experiences and reimagining helped to build discussions and result in the creation of new ideas and perspectives. The PAR PLC framework provided a space and time for educators to delve deeper into topics beyond conveying knowledge.

Expressing affirmation. Affirmation refers to those times when educators chose to either provide support for or go along with presented perspectives. This describes the duality that arose in coding with affirmation in these transcripts, relating-supporting and acquiescing. Relating-supporting marked those times when the speaker was attempting to promote or add evidence to a previous utterance. Acquiescing, on the other hand, took place when educators seemed change their minds toward support or to give up on an argument. Particularly with regard to relating-supporting, affirmation promoted the construction of knowledge through evidence and community backing of perspectives. Acquiescing, while not always antithetical to constructing knowledge, often occurred when educators did not seem to express confidence or comfort in sharing ideas. The language structures of affirmation did take on the most typical monosyllabic utterances such as, “yeah” and “uh huh.” Those do not add as much to the understanding of this learning community as noticing the nuances embedded in the agreements. For instance, an utterance like, “yes, and” typically preceded a supporting evidence and anecdote. Additionally, it was evident during meetings and through transcripts that there were times when educators agreed with each other begrudgingly. The acquiescence in participant

language tells a story as well. In the following excerpt from the first meeting, three teachers talked about the amount of direction to give students when explaining writing assignments. This was part of a greater discussion that day about student critical thinking and how to teach critical thinking in writing instruction. This excerpt exemplifies the potential issue of disengagement caused by affirmation.

Alfred: The only way to keep students engaged—you’ve got to have an exact set, spell it out, of what you want them to do? [experience]

Martin: Does that do a disservice, though? Like, does that show how the way to really problem solve it out? [discussion]

Leslie: I agree with Al. They, uh, it’s better to spell it all out front than to confuse them by being too open-ended. [relating-supporting]

Martin: (hesitant) Right. [acquiescing]

Alfred brought up an idea about engaging students, which he felt strongly about. Martin clearly wanted to challenge the idea, so he questioned it to further discussion; however, Leslie’s relating-supporting affirmation of Alfred’s idea, which seemed to ignore Martin’s attempt at a discussion, resulted in Martin stopping the discussion with acquiescence and no further challenge. The way in which Leslie used the relating-supporting language feature here was not conducive to the construction of knowledge. Her support uses definite language, “...it’s better...,” rather than posing her opinions as subjective. When relating-supporting affirmation was not supported by evidence, as in Leslie’s case here, it was difficult for educators to continue a discussion. Countering unexplained beliefs can be much more difficult than discussing ideas supported by observation. Martin acquiesced after a pause, as if to indicate he did not know what to say

in the face of the certainty Leslie presented. In that case, the discussion could go no further because everyone seemed to have affirmed Alfred's idea. Without further development of his notion about student directions, it would be difficult to say knowledge was constructed there. Part of the development of the PAR PLC involved the negotiation of talk; affirmation seemed comfortable and supportive, but it did not always move the conversation toward improving ideas and action. As the PAR PLC developed processes of talk, affirmation became more constructive.

In the following excerpt from the twelfth meeting, teachers discussed the output and sharing of their data collection of student interviews. That meeting had been mostly about their writing instruction data collection with students, and we all wanted to find ways to share out what we had been finding and developing in terms of writing instruction. This excerpt stands as an example of affirmation as supporting knowledge construction.

Luther: I could see it if we take those student interviews and make videos to show the other teachers about conferencing. [reimagining]

Gabe: Yes! This is like, yes. Please. That would have been what I needed year one, ya'll. [relating supporting]

Ali: That's what I need now! [relating supporting]

Cass: Totally, me too. I get the idea, but seeing it is huge. [relating supporting] We could even do a Youtube channel and share it and—I like the idea of showing something and what better way if we take all the stuff we've been doing and, uh, you know, put it out there. [reimagining]

Luther posits the reimagined notion of taking ideas they had talked about and sharing them through video. Gabe, Ali, and Cass all related that they felt strongly about this as a

means of teaching that might not be evident as a novice writing teacher. The relating-supporting affirmation here existed as a series of ideas made up of experience and perspectives that built toward continued construction of knowledge through supportive talk. These instances of relating-supporting not only offered affirmation for its own sake, however; they also allowed for a building process through collaborated perspectives to the point where Cass suggested the reimagined idea that a whole channel of showcased ideas about writing instruction could be useful. In contrast to relating-supporting language that is definite, the teachers here all posited beliefs and support in a way that allowed for others to use exploratory talk. There was excitement in Gabe and Ali's way of speaking personally about the idea and how they could use it that helped in Cass adding to the idea. Affirmation with regard to the construction of knowledge in this learning community was additive more often than not. The talk in the PAR PLC focused first on conveying knowledge and then on affirmation of those ideas. Initially, that affirmation seemed trite, but as the community coalesced around constructing knowledge toward improving writing instruction, educators used affirmation as a way to build ideas and supply confidence. The other two modes build upon that foundation.

Asking questions. The questioning mode of intercommunication refers to those points in speaking where educators made an utterance with the purpose of getting more information. This was an important function in the construction of knowledge within the PAR PLC because it led to educators refining ideas and reflecting upon them. Sometimes, asking questions promoted clarity. I coded the mode of intercommunication with the language feature clarifying whereby the speaker indicated wanting to know more

about the process. Another language feature of asking questions, discussion questioning, took on multiple roles in the learning community. Discussion questions could be used near the introduction of a topic to develop it further, or they could be used to change the subject, get speakers back on topic, or interject humor. Most typically, questions became a mode to further interaction; however, question language had the ability to stifle conversations and cause uncertainty which is not conducive to constructing knowledge. In the following excerpt from the third meeting, Luther shared his reimagined concept of grammar instruction and Alfred questioned his perspective. The group had been discussing the idea of explicit grammar instruction and its role in modern teaching. This exchanged serves as an example of the uncomfortable nature of discussion that occurred at times during talk.

Luther: (laughs) I'm just going to, you know, put this out there. I think everyone should be doing some kind of explicit grammar teaching in their content area. Every subject has a way of speaking and, uh, writing that, uh, is unique. You know? [reimagining]

Alfred: Does grammar always matter, though? Does grammar matter in math? Does it matter, uh, in like, physics or something? [discussion]

Luther: Oh yeah, I get what you're saying. I mean I guess it doesn't always— [acquiescence]

Leslie: I think it's pretty important. [relating supporting]

Luther: Yeah, I guess I didn't really think about it. It might not, uh, always apply. [acquiescence]

Luther reimagined this idea of grammar across the curriculum and was met with a discussion line of questioning from Alfred. Alfred's questions were valid, but the way he

posed them seemed somewhat aggressive. His repeated use of the “matter” notes that he probably did not think that explicit grammar instruction would work in the specific fields he noted. Possibly due to the number of questions or the way in which they were said, Luther did not seem either prepared or willing to meet that discussion and, despite some affirmation from Leslie, chose to acquiesce. Alfred’s discussion question was posed in a way that implied he did not agree with Luther’s suggestion about grammar; his use of “though” indicates a counterpoint while the video of this excerpt points to Alfred leaning forward while speaking with Luther pulling his shoulders back while speaking. While Alfred probably did want to have a conversation about this topic, Luther did not seem ready to engage in that discussion. This could be a result of uncertainty about the topic or due to a lack of confidence about engaging in this type of discussion. Either way, posing discussion questions in a disagreeable manner, as with Alfred here, was not usually very successful in promoting actual discussion and, as a result, did not support the construction of knowledge.

Educators’ use of asking questions language features toward the construction of knowledge took shape earliest as reflection. Many discussion language features indicated a development of reflection with regard to each person as a teacher, the environment of the school and learning community, and the instruction of students. In terms of self-reflections, educators clearly became more comfortable discussing their positions as teachers and noting strengths and weaknesses. The following excerpt comes from the seventh meeting of the learning community and showcases Angela reflecting out loud

through asking a question about making time for writing conferences. Teachers had been sharing their experiences with trying out writing conferences.

Angela: I've been bad lately. With testing and meetings and all, I have not been doing well with writing conferences. [experience]

Cass: I know, right? It's hard to make time for it. [relating supporting]

Martin: We've got to make time for it, though. [refutation]
I know, it's-

Angela: You're right, you're right. It's about what's best for students.
[acquiescence]
How are you all doing it? [discussion]

Angela had clearly been thinking about the need to continue the writing conferences the learning community was supporting as part of improving writing instruction and regretted not making time to do it, as she shared. Cass offered support for the idea that time is a difficulty in doing conferencing, but Martin reinforced the need for it. Angela was able to show her reflection in progress by quickly acquiescing to her conclusion about knowing it was best for students and posing the discussion question to the group to help her negotiate the issue. This particular excerpt speaks to Angela's comfort with the group to use a question to ask for feedback; similar conversations occurred that indicate educator reflection toward practice through asking questions about their teaching. Thus, questioning furthered the conversation and participant construction of knowledge. This means the talk might have led to the acknowledgement of a need for change or a realization of some perspective that had been previously elusive through questioning. That is what happened with the excerpt above; after Angela asked for what others were

doing, they shared those ideas, but Angela did not explicitly state her plan of action, rather she questioned so she could listen. That was a reliant, participatory action negotiated through the PAR PLC framework contributory to the construction of knowledge through improved writing instruction.

Sometimes, educators reflected through discussion which led to action through creating ideas. The following is an excerpt from the transcript of the ninth meeting which shows the end of a discussion about the writing plan the teachers had been developing. There had been talk about needing organization to what was becoming a list of good ideas with no direction. Martin began by trying to clarify a resolution to the conversation.

Martin: Then we should add that to the writing plan. Who wants to type that up so it looks, good? [clarifying]

Fran: Hold on. We can't just add everything to the plan, or we'll just have a list instead of something usable [refutation]

Martin: Understood, but how do we do that with so many ideas? [discussion]
I could see maybe a flowchart or- [reimagining]

Cass: I think we need to be systematic about it. What if we use one meeting just to reorganize all these ideas? [reimagining]

Fran: Great. That'll clear up the process right-

Martin: That'll be a meeting I look forward to because I need to have an idea of how to use—how some of you are using these ideas. [discussion]

Cass and Fran here showed a reflection of the community at large through discussion.

Fran refuted the idea that a simple list of good ideas would be an effective outcome of the learning community. Cass reimagined the nature of the community into a workshop for the writing plan, specifically during one meeting. This excerpt shows discussion on

several levels. First, Cass was thinking about the practices of the community as it tried to make use of the ideas. Second, Fran imagined, with help from her vast experience, the potential pitfalls of other learning communities who did not take the time to organize findings and ideas and, thus, failed to act upon them. Last and most notably, Martin called on the discussion of the other educators in the group to learn about his own practice. The use of discussion questions toward writing instruction let the educators ask about what they wanted to learn about. The last statement made by Martin really denotes a further discussion he wanted to have about how to use the instructional ideas from the meetings. That implied his reflective practice made possible through discussion. Martin moved the construction of knowledge in this excerpt toward application with his desire for discussion. “How do we...” is a community-oriented discussion question sharing the responsibility of constructing ideas through all educators’ perspectives and reflections. Discussion questions had that ability to incite talk which inspired community unity toward goals.

The method of questioning took on a quick pace in many meetings. The negotiation between clarifying an idea to better understand it and discussing that idea in order to construct knowledge became a familiar process that was an important part of community talk. In the following example from the eighth learning community meeting, educators used both discussion and clarifying questions to refine an idea. Educators were discussing the value of writing by-hand and using digital mediums. This is the first time it had been explicitly discussed, but some of the teacher had been hinting at not enough focus on handwriting.

Patrick: What do you think about handwriting work versus typing in your classes? [discussion]

Ali: You mean, like, papers or what? [clarifying]

Patrick: Anything, but specifically in-class, on-demand stuff.

Alfred: They hand-write every note they take for me; I think it works better than anything. [experience]

Fran: So you'd say you see a difference doing it that way? [discussion]

Alfred: Oh yeah. Keeps them busy.

Luther: Have you ever tried to have them type in-class? [clarifying]

Alfred: No. They get enough of that everywhere else. [refutation]

The discussion continued on from there, but the negotiation between sharing ideas and then questioning them to both clarify and discuss is evident. After I began the discussion with a question focused on the handwriting topic I knew educators wanted to get into, Ali immediately wanted clarification as to what the general term “handwriting” meant in the context of the question. Alfred’s experience led to Fran who extended the discussion to get at the heart of the true difference between digital writing and handwriting. Alfred responded tersely, prompting Luther to attempt clarification as to whether Alfred could speak to the difference at all. “Have you ever...” tended to be a way for educators to clarify a point someone had made while making a counter point. Alfred refuted using both types of writing per his belief that students could focus on one in his class. Two points to notice from this excerpt are the robust nature of the questions and the quick back-and-forth between educators asking questions. Sometimes clarifying questions were much more simple as in, “Did I hear you say...” types of factual statements. There was a

strategy to these clarifying questions here. Luther, for example, seemed to question whether Alfred had tried other methods of notetaking with students. Rather than challenging or refuting here, he chose to have Alfred clarify, a strategy that elicited more comfort, and thus more discussion, from educators than refutation directly. Before Alfred spoke his last line in this excerpt, there was a branching point in the discussion. At Luther's clarifying question, Alfred could have chosen to reflect through the questioning or to disregard it in order to hold fast to his stance. He could either reflect on his practice and consider trying new methods or disengage by disregarding the implication from Luther. Alfred seemed to choose the latter. Thus, Alfred did not take part in exploratory talk to construct knowledge but rather upheld his own thinking. In this way, it seems that the other educators in the excerpt did work on constructing knowledge around this idea of handwriting and digital writing by problematizing Alfred's stance. Alfred may or may not have individually developed ideas, but his responses to the discussion and clarifying questions did contribute to the community construction of knowledge through talk. Discussion questions were apt to lead to this sort of branching throughout meetings as educators made choices about how to respond. Frequent questioning within learning community meetings marked engagement in the sense that educators were taking part in the process of talk and, more often than not, the construction of knowledge. As such, discussion questions also bridged the gap between conveying knowledge and challenging ideas by encouraging the process of interactive talk.

Challenging ideas. I coded challenging ideas as a mode of intercommunication anytime educators seemed to offer a counter to a posed idea or perspective. This concept

is important in the knowledge construction because challenge occurs at the places in talk where differing perspectives meet. At those junctures of talk, educators either built upon ideas in order to co-construct knowledge or shied away from the difficulty of disagreement. In order to better differentiate between types of challenges, I was able to note two language features of challenge during coding. The first was refutation which refers to those utterances in talk where opposition to a point was made. The second was repositioning where one speaker would increase or decrease the value of what another speaker had said, either directly or indirectly. While both might seem like the more negative aspects of what a community could do during discourse, these were in fact the language features that led discussions into new directions and helped educators further refine ideas through multiple perspectives, particularly refutation. At least in this PAR PLC, if educators had not become adept at challenging ideas in a way that fit into the community dynamic, they may not have been successful in constructing knowledge toward improved writing instruction practices.

To differentiate challenging from questioning lies in the intent. Challenges in this learning community were sometimes direct statements, particularly in later meetings; however, questions could be challenging at times, particularly in a rhetorical nature. Questions in this coding sought to explore a topic more without the speaker necessarily revealing a side or position explicitly; a challenge more clearly indicated the speaker's perspective ran counter to the idea at stake. For example, Gabe and Alfred offered two similar statements in response to a colleagues conveyed knowledge. Gabe said, "What would you do in your class?" This utterance belies no intention by itself and seems

merely inquisitive. On the other hand, Alfred said, “Do you really think that would work in your class?” On the surface, this might seem like a clarifying yes or no question; however, the use of the word “really” and the corresponding emphasis when it was said indicated Alfred took a stance that did not believe in what had been said; that draws a line between question and challenge which can sometimes be similar statements. I also noticed that challenges were sometimes indirect. At times, educators would disagree or change some idea or statement without directly mentioning the idea or the person who had made the utterance. To illustrate, the following excerpt from the sixth meeting showcases both repositioning and refuting language features from the challenging ideas mode of intercommunication. Luther began with the desire to collaborate with other schools about writing portfolios and writing skills development as part of a discussion about where to go with the work the learning community had been doing with writing portfolios.

Luther: Hey, we should take this to the county and see if they’ll let us talk to other teachers about writing portfolio ideas. I know they are doing something, you know, something like writing development. [reimagining]

Leslie: Nope. I don’t think so. Probably won’t work. [refutation]
You haven’t been around as long as me, yet, so let me tell you; [repositioning]
we’ve tried working together, and it just does not work. You’ve got all chiefs and no Indians. [refutation]

Luther: (sighs) I could probably see that. [acquiescence]

After Luther shared his reimagined idea, Leslie both refuted it and repositioned Luther to devalue his opinion about the topic. Leslie quickly brought on a number of reasons why Luther’s idea about talking to the county about collaborating with other schools was not

only difficult but impossible. The combination here of direct refutation of Luther's idea followed by Leslie repositioning him to a station lower than her own due to her greater number of years of teaching experience seemed to shut down Luther. His sigh indicated either some frustration or concession followed by acquiescence with Leslie's notion that it would not work. Leslie's second refutation was rather non-specific, stating that it just wouldn't work, and included a common platitude, "...all chiefs and no Indians." These language features combined in this way seem to amount to a dismissal of Luther. This would be indicative of unsuccessful knowledge construction as Luther probably had some ideas to share, but no longer felt either comfortable or worthwhile bringing those forward. The talk of challenge, in this way, had to become a part of PAR PLC that promoted construction of knowledge rather than stunted it by enculturating itself into the process.

Refutation by itself does not stagnate construction of knowledge, however, and can promote exploratory talk. In the following excerpt from the twelfth meeting, Luther and Leslie handled refutation differently. Here, the learning community was sharing about classroom writing practices changing over time and the topic of cell phones in the class came up.

Luther: I, for an, uh, example, let students use cell phones in class to send each other feedback. [experience]

Leslie: Oh man, that seems like it'd just cause a distraction rather than accomplish what you're going for. [refutation]

Luther: Actually, it's really cool. They get the hang of it after a little bit it's just another part of class, but this gets them more likely to give better feedback to peers than joking it off. [refutation]

Leslie: Well, you'll have to show me, then. [acquiescence]
You've got me interested.

This later meeting shows how refutations were used as a means to construct knowledge through talk toward building ideas and fostering curiosity. Luther shared his experience of having students use cell phones for academic purposes. Leslie refuted the concept calling it a distraction. Refutation from Leslie was met with a counter refutation from Luther where he further explained his position with a description of the process and it's enculturation in the classroom, "...it's just another part of class..." Luther also used the refutation as an opportunity to promote his idea about using cell phones as feedback by suggesting it actually improved peer feedback. This piqued Leslie's interest evidently as she acquiesced, wanting to see a demonstration. This looks very much like a discussion where ideas are shared and perspectives can actually shift. Leslie displayed this in that her initial skepticism at cell phones in the classroom changes into curiosity. She explicitly stated her interest in the topic and deferred, "show me," to Luther. A level of trust is necessary in this that had to develop through time and collaboration between educators. In the other example, Leslie dismissed ideas, refuting and repositioning them, due to having more experience. In the above excerpt, it seemed that Leslie believed in Luther's teaching enough to give him the benefit of the doubt. This was one of the most difficult modes of intercommunication for educators to create a regular pattern of language as it ran counter to their initial comfort in affirming each other's belief even through disagreement. In fact, it seemed that repositioning and refutation were the features of talk that tended to have the most to do with power in terms of trying to hold it and place

others into certain ways of thinking; thus, these language features directly led to more failure to co-construct knowledge through talk more often than others.

Having the confidence to challenge ideas, which was indicative of power in the group, and experience in teaching were interrelated and sometimes made it difficult for less experienced teachers to take part in the talk. Challenging ideas mode of intercommunication occurred most frequently with more experienced teachers. They tended to more readily refute and reposition other speakers; In fact, Angela, Alfred, and Leslie sometimes stated something to the effect that due to their number of years in education, their perspectives held more weight.

The following excerpt from the fifth meeting shows a little bit of the issue that took place with experience and the dismissal of some ideas based on the power differential of experience between educators. This excerpt comes from a discussion about late work policies, a topic that could come up often throughout meetings and that generally saw battle lines on the topic drawn generationally.

Patrick: So what about this notion of late work? Do you take a late writing assignment? [discussion]

Cass: It's tough-it could go on and on, but you, uh, want to show learning. [experience]

Gabe: Yep. I'll take it late. I don't care. [relating-supporting]

Luther: I'm on the fence. I've gone back and forth different years. I just can't stand (laughs) waiting until the end of the semester for them to turn something in. [relating-supporting]

Gabe: You've just got to stay on top of them. Talk to them when it's late and find out the problem. Make a plan and, boom, it'll happen. The most important thing is showing learning. [experience]

Ali: I like that- [relating-supporting]

Leslie: That's good to say, but you're still new. [repositioning]
If you don't have hard guidelines for due dates like in the real world, man, they will take you for granted, buddy. Walk all over it. [refutation]

Gabe: I mean, I do it, but I, uh, don't feel like they walk over it or- [refutation]

Leslie: You end up waiting forever though, don't you? It's a nightmare.
[refutation]

Gabe: Maybe so. [acquiescence]

After I posed the question about late work, Cass, Gabe, and Luther began about their own individual stance toward the process through sharing experience and relating to and supporting each other's ideas. Cass gave a non-committal answer while Gabe firmly stated his stance that late did not matter. Gabe later supported that idea by sharing his knowledge from experience about the importance of communication with students. Luther seemed to support accepting late work but noted a frustration with having a lot of assignments at the end of the semester. Ali began to relate to the perspectives of the other three before she was cut off by Leslie. Leslie outright refuted the ideas of Cass, Luther, and Gabe after she repositioned them as less experienced and not considerate of the real world as she saw it. She seemed aggressive in her stance on this, and that might have been a result of Gabe's simplification of what she deemed a complex problem, "Make a plan and, boom, it'll happen." Her atypical level of aggression can be noted by her diminutive use of the word "buddy" during her refutation. The outcome was not only a non-starter, but the repositioning by Leslie seemed to throw Gabe's attempt at refutation off such that he ended up acquiescing. Gabe did attempt to make an argument, but his

speech was not assembled and he seemed unsure of what to say in the face of the confidence Leslie displayed. A majority of repositioning throughout the learning community took place in relation to experience in education. As a contrast, relating-supporting occurred most frequently in the least experienced teachers; this could be a result of uncertainty, but because it frequented with less experienced teachers even as they developed the confidence in language to share and refute, it seems to be more indicative that less experienced teachers were more open to new ideas. The above example indicates how refutation and repositioning, particularly in an aggressive manner, shut out opportunities to continue knowledge construction and avoided exploratory talk as educators felt that certain topics became locked off, like accepting late work in the above excerpt.

In contrast, the following excerpt with educators considering accountability measures for students and teachers from the tenth meeting exemplifies challenging ideas as constructing knowledge through the shaping of ideas rather than holding certain perspectives as sacred. Accountability was a subtopic in almost every meeting as ideas often came back around to how to show that students are learning to become better writers.

Angela: But I—I think the point most of you are missing, and this is my age speaking from being around schools for so long, [repositioning]
we have to have a way to hold students accountable to hold up to the others and the county that say, ‘Hey, this is good.’ [refutation]
Some of you all aren’t thinking long-term, big picture because you just haven’t been there (laughs) [repositioning]

Ali: I don’t agree. We are thinking long-term just long-term for students and what they’re learning. [refutation]

Gabe: Right? It's not like no one is thinking about accountability. [refutation]
Who are we accountable for most importantly, though? (looking at Angela)
[discussion]

Angela: I get what you're saying. We just need to keep thinking. [acquiescence]

Angela used a string of utterances that repositioned the unidentified "some of you" as less knowledgeable about the topic at hand, thus elevating her opinion as the most informed. Ali outright refuted her position on accountability by noting that student learning is more important than county policy. Gabe added to that by refuting that her assessment of the goal-orientation of the group was too narrow and posed a strategic discussion question targeting Angela's student-centered teaching philosophy, "Who are we accountable for most importantly, though?" This was a rhetorical discussion question that really coupled with his refutation. Rather than aggression, Ali and Gabe used logical and passionate argument in their refutations to try to widen Angela's perspective of accountability. Angela seemed to sense this, "I get what you're saying," and acquiesced. This came across as rather reflective than dismissive. Angela did not seem to feel rebuked, but rather Gabe's question about the most important accountability for teachers, though unanswered, seemed enough to get Angela moving toward the others on the issue. In this way, construction of knowledge came from challenging ideas because educators used the clash of differing perspectives to lead to new understandings and use exploratory talk.

How Does Participant Language Use Change Over the Course of Time in This Learning Community about Writing?

The previous section noted the general patterns for how educators used language to construct knowledge about writing instruction. In order to better understand these

patterns, the second research question of this study investigates changes in language over the course of all the learning community meetings. Toward responding to this question, I employed two methods of data analysis. First, I conducted a slider scale survey patterned after Desimone (2009) components of an effective professional learning community. The results of the three implementations of this survey support the findings from the discourse analysis of the change in transcripts over time. I present these findings first as they provide a perspective into each participant's views regarding professional learning and the development of certain aspects of this learning community. Held together with discourse analysis findings, these survey data promote the idea that changes in language practices over time were also met with changes of participant perspectives of professional learning community practices. Next, I took a closer look at the number of occurrences of the modes of intercommunication. I counted the total of all coded utterances by adding each category together and then displayed each as a percentage of that whole. After obtaining the resulting percentages for the total of all the codes, I decided to take the totals of the first five meetings, middle five meetings, and last four meetings separately in order to display changes over the course of the meetings in stages. I have displayed these results as pie charts. Alongside these, I have chosen excerpts from the discourse analysis which I feel exemplify these changes. Together, these data allow for a rich description of the ways in which participant practices of using language to construct knowledge changed over the course of this learning community on writing.

Slider-Scale Survey Results

The design of the slider-scale survey addresses two main areas concerning the second research question in this study pertaining to the change in this learning community over time. First, the items that educators scored are each components of importance in professional learning communities drawn from the review of the literature; namely, 1) engagement, 2) relevance, 3) sense of community, 4) communication, and 5) goal-orientation. Figure 3 shows the survey as it appeared to educators.

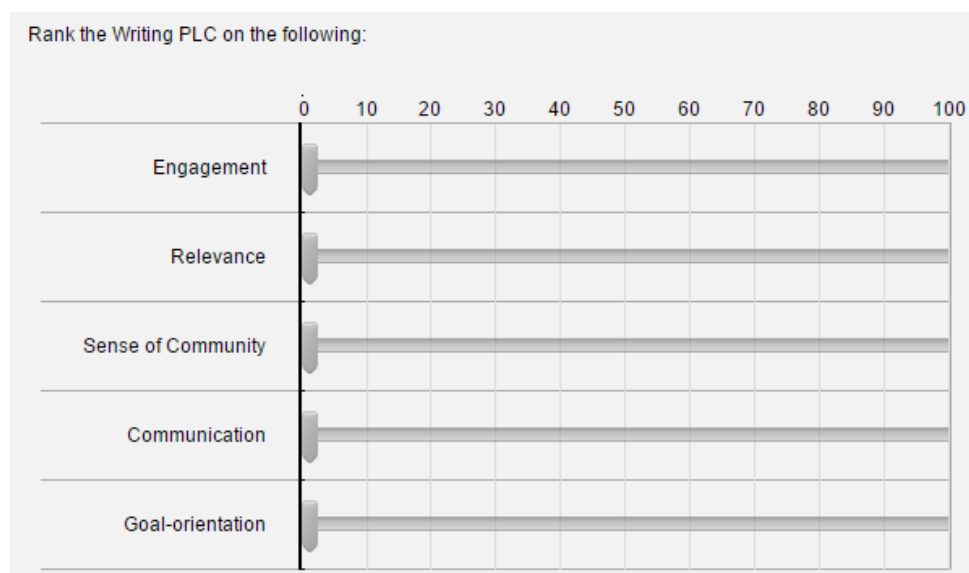


Figure 3. Slider-Scale Survey Ranking PLC Components.

Second, by scoring these components on an interval scale, the data were able to show changes over time in the perspectives of educators with regard to the learning community. To better explain these changes, each of the three implementations of the survey is considered using descriptive statistics and individual participant score results

before a cross-comparison of results. The limitations of these survey data with small sample sizes and few comparative examples should be noted.

Initial survey. This implementation of the slider-scale survey took place before the first meeting of the writing PLC. Educators were asked to score the categories according to their past experiences with professional development and professional learning communities. Table 5 outlines these results.

Table 5

Slider-Scale Surveys before Beginning Writing PLC

Participant	Engagement	Relevance	Sense of Community	Communication	Goal- Orientation	Mean
Gabe	20	30	15	35	40	28
Luther	20	35	20	40	35	30
Leslie	30	50	25	45	50	40
Angela	40	60	15	30	65	42
Fran	40	20	30	20	40	30
Alfred	15	20	20	20	30	21
Ali	50	50	40	75	60	55
Cass	55	70	65	65	70	65
Martin	20	15	10	20	30	19
Patrick	30	40	30	40	50	38
Mean	32	39	27	39	47	36.8
Standard Deviation	13.7	18.3	16	18.8	14.3	14.5

The two descriptive statistics of note from this survey with such a small sample size are the means and the standard deviations of each category as well as the totals. The mean of each of these categories indicates participant confidence. The standard deviation of each of these categories indicates the level of discrepancy between educators within each

category. Thus, in examining the results of this survey, educators had the lowest confidence in their experiences with sense of community where the mean was 27. On the other hand, goal-orientation recorded the highest mean with a 47 amongst educators. It could then be said that the educators did not feel as confident about professional learning communities promoting a sense of community, and they felt most confident about goal-orientation. The standard deviations for each category are relatively high. This indicates that educators were not in consensus about their perspectives of professional learning communities. For instance, both Ali and Cass are outside the standard deviation with much higher scores in every category. This might be because they are both new teachers and their professional learning experience was predominantly based on college, teacher education program learning communities. On the other hand, Alfred and Martin fall below the standard deviation of the mean. Martin's two lowest scored categories are relevance and sense of community; this may stem from being the only foreign language teacher. Alfred had low scores across all categories reflecting a negative sense of professional learning in general. His lowest category score, engagement with a 15, indicates he has not felt very engaged in his experiences. Generally speaking, the mean score for the initial survey, 36.8, points to a low confidence in professional learning communities across these five areas; however, the standard deviation of the mean scores, 14.5, indicates the wide variety of experiences of the educators.

Mid-point survey. The next survey was conducted at the end of the fifth meeting of the learning community. Educators were now asked to score the categories based on their experiences in this particular writing PLC. Table 6 reflects the results of this survey.

Table 6

Slider-Scale Surveys after Fifth Writing PLC Meeting

Participant	Engagement	Relevance	Sense of Community	Communication	Goal- Orientation	Mean
Gabe	75	90	90	85	75	83
Luther	80	80	85	85	75	81
Leslie	90	85	90	90	90	89
Angela	100	90	90	80	80	88
Fran	85	85	90	75	75	82
Alfred	75	70	80	70	80	75
Ali	100	95	95	85	90	93
Cass	90	90	85	80	80	85
Martin	80	70	75	70	70	73
Patrick	90	75	85	75	70	79
Mean	87	83	87	80	79	83.2
Standard Deviation	9.1	8.8	5.8	6.9	7.1	6.2

The results of the mid-point survey report a rise in the mean scores and a decrease in standard deviation across all categories. The shrinking standard deviation can be attributed to both the shared experience of the learning community as well as a greater consensus in the positivity across categories as the scores rise. Interestingly, goal-orientation, the previously highest rated category, decreased to the lowest scoring category. Alternatively, the lowest scoring category from the initial survey, sense of community, tied for the highest score in the mid-point survey. These changes point to major shifts in the perspectives of educators. Looking across participant scores, Cass fell within the standard deviation of the mean; the other new teacher, Ali, still fell outside of the standard deviation of the mean with higher scores than most educators, particularly in

engagement. Martin and Alfred each still fell outside of the standard deviation of the mean with lower mean scores; however, each of the two reported significantly higher scores across all categories than in the initial survey. The increased mean score of educators, 83.2, seems to indicate a growing confidence in the categories from the survey. Thus, there had been some sort of change in participant perspectives of professional learning communities from the first survey about general experience with PLC and their experiences with this PAR PLC.

Final survey. At the conclusion of the final meeting of the writing PLC, educators were asked to score the learning community in each of the five categories. Table 7 represents the results of the final survey.

Table 7

Slider-Scale Surveys after Final Writing PLC Meeting

Participant	Engagement	Relevance	Sense of Community	Communication	Goal- Orientation	Mean
Gabe	95	100	100	95	90	96
Luther	90	90	100	90	95	93
Leslie	100	95	95	95	90	95
Angela	100	100	100	95	95	98
Fran	95	95	100	95	85	94
Alfred	90	95	90	85	85	89
Ali	100	100	100	100	90	98
Cass	100	95	100	95	90	96
Martin	95	90	95	90	90	92
Patrick	95	95	100	95	90	95
Mean	96	96	98	94	90	94.8
Standard Deviation	3.9	3.7	3.4	4.1	3.3	2.8

The final survey results report the highest mean scores across all categories as well as the lowest standard deviations across all categories. The mean scores across all categories were over 90; this indicates a high level of confidence with the learning community with regard to these five categories. Additionally, the mean score of all categories, 94.8, implies a high general sense of confidence across all educators in the learning community. The small standard deviation across mean scores, 2.8, reflects that there was very little deviation amongst participant mean scores, and thus, educators tended to come closer to a consensus of positivity with regard to the learning community. Goal-orientation still proffered the lowest score amongst educators. Sense of community increased to the highest score of all categories. Communication had the greatest discrepancy with the highest standard deviation; the lowest score from this category was an 85 and the highest was a 100. Alfred's score of 85 drives this high standard deviation as the only score below a 90, 9 points below the mean score for the communication category. This indicates his perspective is apart from the other educators. In all, Alfred remained below the standard deviation of the mean score, but at 89, his score, while an outlier, was not greatly lower than the mean score with such a low standard deviation. These results indicate a high level of confidence across all categories and a general consensus of effectiveness toward the learning community.

Changes across meetings. Each survey revealed the perspectives of the educators with regard to the learning community, or in the case of the first survey, learning community experiences. Analyzing the results across all three surveys shows a definite

change over time. Figure 4 displays the mean scores of each category across all three implementations of the survey.

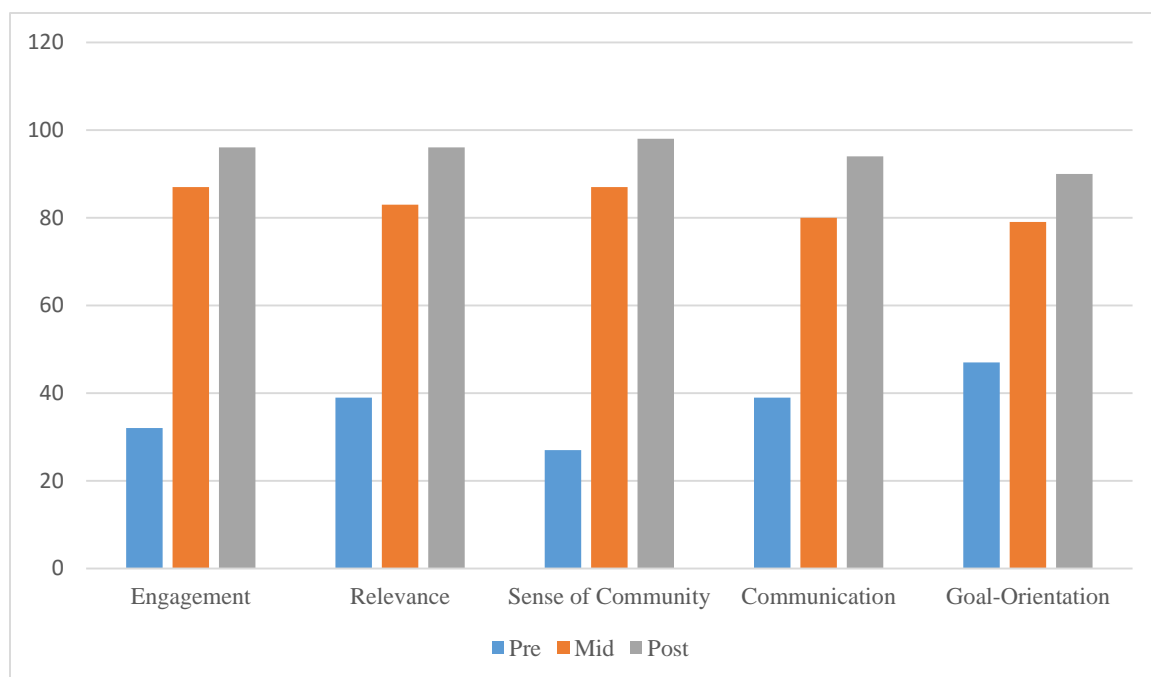


Figure 4. Slider-Scale Survey Mean Scores across Categories and Implementations.

The category with the most increase in mean score was sense of community. The initial survey reported a 27 mean score across all educators for this category while the final survey resulted in a 98 mean score. This indicates a major change in confidence; the initial survey measured participant perspectives based on past experiences with professional learning whereas the final survey measured the participant confidence in the effectiveness of the writing PLC across the five categories. As a result, the highest increase in mean score in the sense of community category indicates the most growth of any category and the greatest shift in participant perspective. Goal-orientation saw the least change in mean score from the initial survey to the final survey; though the change

is still notable. Participatory action research helped create this learning community that had the effect of raising the sense of community among educators. All categories saw a rise in scores from the initial survey to the final survey. As these categories are based on tenets of effective professional learning among teachers, the growth across all categories indicates a high sense of effectiveness of this professional learning community as compared to other learning communities in which educators had taken part. Table 8 represents a more detailed investigation of initial (pre) and final (post) survey scores between categories and individuals.

Table 8

Slider-Scale Surveys Pre and Post Average Scores

Participant	Engagement		Relevance		Sense of Community		Communication		Goal-Oriented		Mean	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Gabe	20	95	30	100	15	100	35	95	40	90	28	96
Luther	20	90	35	90	20	100	40	90	35	95	30	93
Leslie	30	100	50	95	25	95	45	95	50	90	40	95
Angela	40	100	60	100	15	100	30	95	65	95	42	98
Fran	40	95	20	95	30	100	20	95	40	85	30	94
Alfred	15	90	20	95	20	90	20	85	30	85	21	89
Ali	50	100	50	100	40	100	75	100	60	90	55	98
Cass	55	100	70	95	65	100	65	95	70	90	65	96
Martin	20	95	15	90	10	95	20	90	30	90	19	92
Patrick	30	95	40	95	30	100	40	95	50	90	38	95
Mean	32	96	39	96	27	98	39	94	47	90	36.8	94.8
Standard Deviation	13.7	3.9	18.3	3.7	16	3.4	18.8	4.1	14.3	3.3	14.5	2.8

The change in standard deviation could indicate that participant perspectives of the effectiveness of the professional learning community became more alike. This is probably a result of more similar experiences as the educators go through the same learning community rather than on past, varied experiences. There is also a decrease in the standard deviation of mean scores from the mid-point survey and the final survey, each of which was based solely on the experience of this learning community. This change further indicates a closer, positive consensus among educators across categories and generally with regard to the effectiveness of the learning community.

Analysis by individuals also reveals important changes in perspectives over time. Martin showed the greatest change across all categories from his initial survey scores to the final survey. Mimicking the group dynamic, the category with the greatest change in mean score was sense of community rising from 10 to 95. This, with a significant increase in the engagement category as well, indicates a greater feeling of involvement than with previous experiences of professional learning. Ali and Cass reported the smallest change in mean scores across categories, mostly due to higher initial survey scores; however, their final survey scores were among the highest of all educators, still indicating a growth in their senses of effectiveness of the learning community. Despite reporting the lowest mean score of all educators, Alfred still showed an increase like his colleagues. His largest increase came from the relevance category, pointing to the fact that while his perspectives of involvement are still lower than peers, his value of the content of the learning community is high. Most educators scored goal-orientation the lowest of all categories; this might be a function of the nature of the learning community whereby

multiple topics were discussed in a meeting, some theoretical, that did not always lead directly to action-based outcomes. However, the increase in mean score in goal-orientation does reflect a stronger sense of effectiveness in that category. Interestingly, age, race, and gender did not play an immediately evident factor in the change overtime. Years of teaching experience did for new teachers, as with Ali and Cass, but not so with experienced classroom teachers. Fran, Angela, and Leslie comprise the most experienced group of educators among all educators, and their scores fall in line with the mean scores of the group. These survey data reveal changes in participant perspectives with regard to professional learning communities from the first meeting until the last. With that said, these data merely set the stage for the focus of the research question which is language and how it changes over time during these PAR PLC meetings on writing. The perspectives from the surveys serve as a background for the analysis of participant talk.

Changes in Language Use over Time

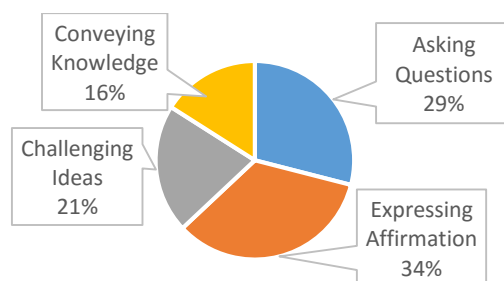


Figure 5. Frequency of Four Modes of Intercommunication in Relation to One Another (Total).

The pie chart in Figure 5 represents the percentage out of all utterances made by each participant, my own talk included, for each mode of intercommunication.

Affirmation takes up the highest total percentage of interaction at 34%. Taken into account across all meetings, this could mean that the educators were generally agreeable with each other rather than dissenting. It could also mean that educators chose to agree rather than challenge ideas. That is why the 21% challenge figure is so important; educators may have been very supportive, but clearly they also felt comfortable in finding instances to take a counter-stance. Also of interest is the questions mode of intercommunication accounting for 29% of coded talk. This might indicate that educators either needed a good deal of clarification or that questions served an important purpose in the communication process. Examining the transcripts, by and large the majority of questions were exploratory in nature; rather than clarifying, educators used questions to move the discussion along through testing ideas and interrogating problems. That knowledge only took up 16% of the utterances across all learning community meetings also raises a few considerations. Educators clearly did not bring in new information as much as they used the other modes. As a result, it seems that the group as a whole spent more time problematizing a few selected topics than consistently bringing in new ones. This has implications for the community mindset in that, over time, the learning community somehow collectively made a choice to hone in on a more focused set of ideas for discussion. Whether this was for the good or detriment of the learning community as a whole requires further analysis. Additionally, to better understand the meaning of these totals, a breakdown of their development across sections of time of the learning community meetings is necessary.

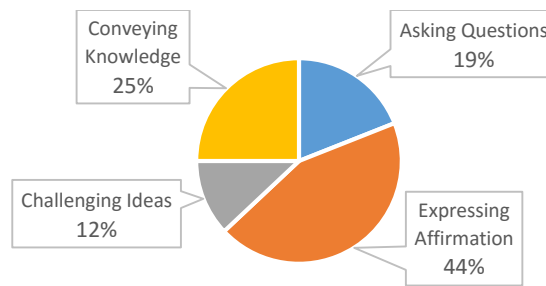


Figure 6. Frequency of Four Modes of Intercommunication in Relation to One Another (First Five Meetings).

First five meetings. The percentages in Figure 6 represent the frequency of each mode of intercommunication out of all coded utterances from the first five meetings of the learning community. This stage of the learning community contributes a look at the early building process and formulation of trust among educators. This can be noted by the high level of affirmation and knowledge with a relatively low amount of questions and challenge. During the first few meetings, a majority of the talk involved sharing experiences or reimagining some idea followed by another participant agreeing by relating-supporting or sometime acquiescence. Educators seemed hesitant to challenge or question one another. In the very first meeting, educators even seemed hesitant to ask clarifying questions. The challenges that arose as a result of new ideas at this stage were more often in the form of a rhetorical question rather than a direct refutation. This did not generate discussion as much as it led to non-starters. During the focus group at the end of the meetings, one participant noted of this figure, “We treated this like any other professional development at first. You just hear and listen and, uh, you’re not sure what to do when it changes.” Data support this claim. A majority of the knowledge during these meetings came from me directed toward the group. Pauses and silences were more

often during this stage as educators searched for the language of comfortable interaction. These meetings were productive, as educators have noted; however, they can be viewed as a transition period as the educators were learning to negotiate the terms of the learning community. Structures for communicating were built and social norms were developed. When held against the results from other time frames, the first five meetings imply uncertainty and serve as the starting point for the development of the language community.

The following excerpt from the second meeting is an example of early group uncertainty among educators. Here, I tried to initiate discussion about the purposes of writing, but educators seem unclear of how to proceed. This conversation took place early on in the second meeting, and I was attempting to generate interest in talking about reasons teachers have students write.

Patrick: So what about this notion of, you know, writing-to-learn versus learning-to-write? What is the difference and (laughs) does it matter?
(no response, looking at one another) [discussion question]

Angela: You need both, but you can't do both. [reimagining knowledge]

Ali: (laughs) Wait, what? (looking around the room) [clarifying question]

Patrick: I mean-

Leslie: Writing-to-learn is when you have someone write to figure it out. Learning-to-write is (pause) when you just-you learn how to write. [experience knowledge]

Ali: So what-

Alfred: What do you mean you can't do both? [clarifying question]

Angela: I guess I-(laughs) never mind- I don't know. [acquiescence affirmation]

Alfred: Okay-I-uh-think it's really important I just-I didn't quite get what you meant. [acquiescence affirmation]
 (looks at Patrick) I think there is a good bit of confusion about that-those two. Important to look at for students. Yeah. [relating-supporting affirmation]
 (silence for a few moments)

Patrick: Any other ideas? (waits for a response for a few moments) Well, (laughs) I'll be sure to bring in some reading about that.

The video corresponding to this excerpt shows the nervous body language of educators and how they just looked at one another and me haplessly. Cass and Ali exchanged nervous glances while Luther and Angela looked at me expectantly. Alfred shrugged. Angela began the response to my discussion question with reimagining by presenting a big idea, "You need both, but you can't do both." For those who fully understood the difference between writing-to-learn and learning-to-write, then that statement was probably profound; however, Ali exemplified the confusion possible from someone with little background knowledge of the concepts with, "Wait, what?" Leslie attempted to clarify and define the terms, but Ali and Alfred each expressed confusion. It was at this point that the overabundance of affirmation takes hold. Angela, who provided her big idea first, and Alfred, who asked her a direct clarifying question, both acquiesced. Alfred even went so far as to reify that it seemed important, but that he did not really understand. Also, no one asked discussion questions or challenged ideas to try to understand. Nothing changed as a result of talk; thus, construction of knowledge did not take place here despite attempts. This conversation structure was fairly common in early meetings. It seemed to stem from educators' uncertainty about the nature of questions and challenging. Leslie seemed to think that the question was a refutation; as a result, rather

than defending her ideas, she acquiesced. At this point, the community was not really cohesive yet, and there was not a developed language for how to have this conversation. As a result, everyone started using affirmation to fend off further notice. Also, Angela and Leslie were in the pilot study, so they felt more comfortable talking but had expressed that they did not want to dominate the conversation. Both Alfred and Ali were new to this sort of learning community; thus, they seemed to make an attempt to engage and understand, but both drew back as a result of uncertainty. This improved in later meetings, but this early example exemplifies struggles in this PAR PLC on writing with getting past being conciliatory and affirming everything when uncertain. There is some knowledge that never got expounded upon and two instances of acquiescence toward the end that seemed geared toward avoiding confrontation. Affirmation for the sake of avoidance did not lead to knowledge construction about writing through talk. There was plenty of knowledge about writing within the group, but there was room for more learning and the need for a development of a community means of constructing understanding together.

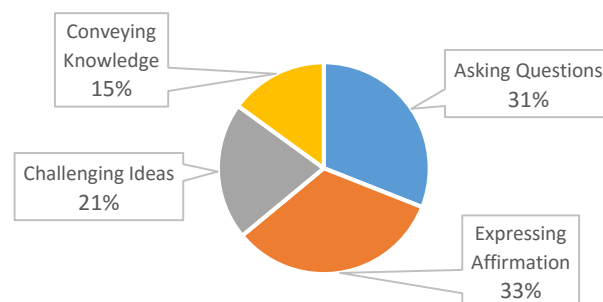


Figure 7. Frequency of Four Modes of Intercommunication in Relation to One Another (Middle Five Meetings).

Middle five meetings. Figure 7 represents the percentage of all coded utterances from the middle five meetings of the learning community about writing falling into the four modes of intercommunication. The middle five meetings mark a noticeable change in the frequency of each mode of intercommunication. Conveying knowledge dropped starkly from 25% of coded utterances to just 15%. During this stage, educators brought up new ideas less and instead focused on debating and retooling ideas considered previously. More time was spent discussing single ideas rather than moving on quickly. Also, other educators took the majority role as sharers of knowledge rather than myself, who took the lead in the first five meetings. This is a significant shift in the dynamics of the learning community. Just looking at the body language of all the modes through the learning community videos, educators looked at me less during this time and instead scanned the room; this is the exact opposite of the first five meetings. Affirmation also dropped from 44% to 33%. As opposed to the first five meetings, educators seemed less inclined to simply agree. Acquiescence was common in the first five meetings, but this middle stage showed more relating-supporting forms of affirmation. The drop in affirmation can also be accounted for with an increase in challenge. Educators began refuting ideas as a comfortable language for disagreement emerged. From the focus group when asked about this change in challenge, “You’re not sure it’s okay to say, ‘Hey, you’re wrong,’ so you don’t and just, uh, you know, go along with it. Later on, we got the hang of it (group laughs).” The group most likely laughed at this statement because of the strong opinions and interactive debates that took place during these last two time frames

of the learning community. It is during this stage that educators created a social language for challenging ideas and were able to do so without causing or taking offense.

Questions saw the greatest increase during this timeframe, and those questions improved the chances that talk led to discussion which helped educators co-construct knowledge about writing. Many clarifying questions were asked in response to both knowledge and challenge as a result of educators wanting to understand the perspective of the speaker.

These clarifying questions also led to discussion questions, however. Educators followed-up with ideas and perspectives that furthered the conversation. “I wonder” and “What if” statements occurred frequently throughout the questions mode of intercommunication.

Discussions were long, as a result, and there were less discussions that ended quickly because of acquiesce or uncertainty. The learning community evolved during this time into a community where members created and used social and language norms that facilitated interaction toward meeting group goals. As part of the changes that occurred in the learning community language toward better collaboration, educators took on the talk of teacher researchers using shared practice. This is evident in the time spent problematizing knowledge through questions and challenge in later meetings.

Additionally, educators gained a confidence in talking about their own teaching and experiences.

To illustrate the improved confidence in talking about the teaching of writing, in the following excerpt from the seventh learning community meeting transcript, Cass, who had not characteristically been one to share and respond to questions well, talked about writing conferences, a hotly debated topic across meetings. Changes in collaboration are

evident in this event where Cass took a stand to share a writing practice she had tried with her students.

Cass: (waves her hand in front of her) I wanted to talk to everyone about the-something I tried the other day in class based on what we talked about.

Martin: Oh yeah?

Cass: (laughs) I, uh, started doing writing conferences with students-based on lab reports. I wanted to-I had them, uh, write a scientific, uh, rebuttal. They had a set of goals, and, uh, they had to use supports to get the point across that they had, uh, or hadn't made a good point. It wasn't long, like, a page- [experience knowledge]

Leslie: Oh, that's alright. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Cass: -but I thought it went well.

Luther: What went well about it? [clarifying question]

Cass: (laughs) Well, we, uh, each student had to tell me how they met the goals and we talked about what needed work and-it was really productive. [experience knowledge]

Martin: Did you show them how to write it first? [clarifying question]

Cass: (shakes her head quickly) Oh yeah! Absolutely. We looked at, um, examples and talked through them and critiqued them. We also talked, like, step-by-step through the process. [experience knowledge]

Fran: Do you think that made it too easy for them? [discussion question]

Gabe: No! They were learn- [refutation challenge]

Cass: Maybe not. This was the first time and, um, next time I'm going to go through—I have all the goals we agreed on and we can build on that- [reimagining knowledge]

Luther: That sounds great! I think you have a good thing going there. I do that with mine. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Angela: Agreed. I'm glad to hear you're taking something away. I've been doing writing conferences with mine as well, and it's just (holds hands up in front of her) the best thing. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Cass: Oh, I can see a difference. I, uh, (laughs) would never have had this idea on my own. I want to keep doing writing with science-writing as scientists (laughs) like we talked about. [reimagining knowledge]

Fran: I'm so proud of you. Keep sharing with us how it goes. [relating-supporting affirmation]
(Cass and Ali high-five, group laughs)

Everyone could tell Cass was nervous, so educators seemed to pay special attention here. Her nerves were most notable by the hesitation “uh” and “um” throughout her speaking. Despite that, there was challenge and questioning to her experience and ideas. Cass expounded on her experience with writing conferences with encouragement from Martin, Leslie, and Luther. She seemed to gain more confidence in talking about it as she went on. Martin asked her to clarify on her process, “Did you show them...?” to which Cass further explained how she set up the writing process. Fran posed a discussion question about making the writing too easy, and Gabe tried to defend Cass, but Cass cuts him off to offer her own response to her question as a reimagined future process for “next time.” Luther and Angela each commiserated with Cass having had similar positive experiences with writing conferences, and Cass acknowledged her development of the process through talk with other educators, “I...never would have had this idea on my own.” The excerpt concluded with Fran, the administrator, expressing pride in Cass while Ali, another new teacher, showed her collegial support as a new teacher with a high-five. This excerpt comes from the seventh meeting, so there is still a good deal of affirmation and experiential knowledge, but the affirmation has shifted somewhat to be one of agreeing

while providing some detailed support from classroom experiences, as with Angela and Luther in this excerpt. The group used the community language to create a safe space to share and critique ideas. At this point, however, the refining of ideas takes place mostly through questioning. The relating-supporting affirmation from Luther and Angela add confidence to Cass such that she could further explain herself and explicitly stated that the discussion of the community helped her to implement this change in her classroom. Also, she responded to both a clarifying question from Martin and a discussion question from Fran. In earlier instances, these might have resulted in uncertainty, but here, after seeing multiple instances of question and response models from others, she seemed more confident in talking about her practice. The implications of this indicate that even language among teachers need mentoring. Without the confidence from a safe space created with peers of equal and more experience, Cass might not have had the opportunity for testing, reflection, and development of practice afforded by the discourse in the learning community. She was able to respond to questions about what she was doing without feeling dismissed; thus, everyone was able to get a better understanding of writing conferences. Though educators came in with preconceived notions of collaboration in learning communities, the ways in which educators in this learning community shared information with each other developed through talk into a support system and testing ground for ideas. The testing ground became more prevalent with questioning to fuel the discussions toward constructing knowledge through talk.

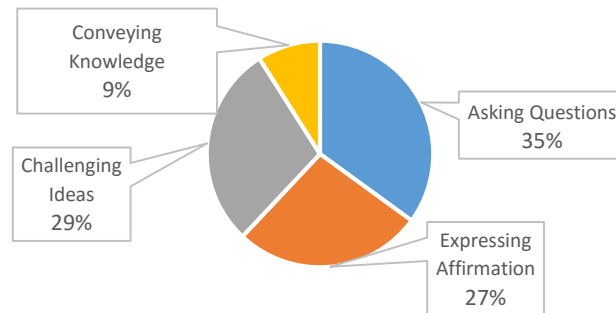


Figure 8. Frequency of Four Modes of Intercommunication in Relation to One Another (Last Four Meetings).

Last four meetings. The last four meetings of the learning community showcase the culmination of the development of a process of talk. Knowledge continued to fall in the final four meetings to 9% of coded utterances. Rather than experience, a majority of this talk tended to take the form of reimagining such that ideas could be employed in educators' practice. This drop also continues to account for educators choosing to discuss and debate previous ideas at length rather than drawing on a continuous stream of new topics. In other words, the construction of knowledge changed from a focus on mostly new ideas to refining previously shared perspectives through talk. For example, student interviews conducted by a participant might be new information, but it stands in affirmation or challenge to the idea that sparked the generation of the interview itself. Educators spoke and worked in this manner during this stage of the group. Affirmation again dropped to 27%. Educators seemed to feel less inclined to offer agreement rather than ask questions to further the discussion or challenge an idea. Questions only increased slightly to 35%. The structure of question language remained much the same in the last four meetings as in the previous five. The content of the questions did change.

Questions targeted the reimagining of ideas as part of a discussion of practice rather than more theoretical conversations. Application emerged as a goal and the language shifted toward that. Challenge rose yet again to 29%. This reflects the myriad debates between educators, particularly about application to practice. As part of more comfort with the language of disagreement, educators not only refuted ideas more but they also offered alternatives as a result. In previous time frames, refutation often came to a simple disagreement, or “agree to disagree” as educators put it. In these final four meetings, action and application being at the forefront, challenge needed to come back around to unity and educators no longer felt comfortable letting opportunities to understand and come to consensus go by. Construction of knowledge through talk centered on creation and organization of plans for action. Action orientation of the participatory action research learning community came to fruition toward the end of the learning community. The language in these modes of intercommunication reflect this shift; educators challenged and questioned toward results and unity more so than at any other point. The next few excerpts are from one discussion the group had about critical thinking in the thirteenth meeting. Critical thinking came up frequently in meetings, but this is one of the last conversations the group had about it; as a result, there are portions of the talk that make perfect sense to the community but might seem incomplete to outside readers; that is an indication of an engaged community with its own speaking patterns. The talk was robust and generally supportive in this excerpt. I think it is one of the best examples to present how knowledge was shared, perspectives negotiated, and challenges handled. Particularly, participant talk in this excerpt showcases how they used challenging and

questioning to further the co-construction of knowledge through discourse. I have broken it into sections for clearer analysis.

Fran: How-how does critical thinking-? [discussion question]

Angela: Can you even teach it though? [discussion question]

Fran: Critical thinking? I think you have to. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Angela: But how? I mean-I don't know if it's explicit or- [clarifying question]

Fran: I see what you mean. [acquiescence affirmation]

The topic of critical thinking and how to teach it as it pertains to writing was a topic that came up frequently. Thus, as quickly as Fran brought it up in discussion here, Angela was ready to discuss it. Also, the interruption did not cause a delay in the discussion as Fran countered with affirmation of the idea, "I think you have to." This section of the excerpt indicates some of the community language patterns that emerged from repeated discussions and learning the mannerisms of other educators. An outsider might not understand, "how does critical thinking?" In the context of the group, we had talked about the relationship of writing and critical thinking so much that it was only a continuation of where the conversation had last left off. Some of the talk is unspoken in this excerpt as Fran and Angela drew upon past discussions. Questioning already dominated the language features because sharing experiences would be unnecessary to continue constructing knowledge. The exchange did not end with her affirmation as Luther picked it up with an idea he had been working on.

Luther: I think you help them experience it and go from there. If-if we set up chances, it can happen. (wide motioning with arms) [reimagining knowledge]

Fran: Really? Isn't that what we've been hoping for, though, and it hasn't happened? [refutation challenge]
(begins statement looking at Luther but ends looking around at everyone questioningly)

Luther: I suppose so, but-I still think if we create the *right* opportunities (trails off) [relating-supporting affirmation]

Cass: That's what I want to talk about. Is something like critical thinking in writing explicitly taught or developed? [discussion question]

Alfred: That's up to the student. I've seen so many times-the student will just-not do. [experience knowledge]
If you don't pick out the problem and work on that student (pause) as an individual, you're going to be in a mess. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Patrick: I like that you mention individualism. [relating-supporting affirmation]
I see that as a big part of Cass' question; can critical thinking be an explicit objective that you tell a student that we're going to work on? [discussion question]

Fran: Of course-

Luther: I don't-well, yeah (laughs and shrugs shoulders) [acquiescence affirmation]

Luther added to the conversation with his reimagined idea of critical thinking as an environmental concern of the writing community within the classroom. Fran refuted the idea, "really?," because they had been trying to create the environment, but it hadn't been as successful. In a difference from previous, early meetings, Luther continued to support his idea, and Cass began a discussion to develop the idea. Alfred offered up his direct experience in the issue but also supported Luther's claim. He did this in characteristic fashion using the colloquial description for having a problem, "mess." While Luther did

acquiesce for the time being, the conversation did not become a non-starter as the language kept the topic moving and Luther did not cut off his interest in the idea of critical thinking as an environmental concern. Fran's challenge started off the debate about being successful in promoting critical thinking. In this way, that challenge opened up more opportunity to discuss and clarify the concept in order to construct understandings through talk, with support from other language features.

In the next section, more strategies were posed toward the greater issue of critical thinking which resulted in questioning and challenging to further shape the ideas through talk.

Gabe: Difficult question. I know with my students-with my students we talk about strategies but not enough. I think that is the explicit part. [experience knowledge]

Fran: I totally agree. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Ali: What kind of strategies? Like, specific to critical thinking? [clarifying question]

Gabe: I guess so, we just-for example, we brainstorm and use thought organizers for everything. I can see that making a difference in the way students are thinking and their preparation. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Ali: I get what you mean. I can get behind that. How do you-

Gabe: And we always talk about them-sorry.

Ali: It's okay. How do you enforce it, though? [clarifying question]
Sometimes with my students it's just-I teach them a strategy and they don't like it immediately and they don't use it, so- [refutation challenge]

Leslie: Do you *teach* them the strategy, or do you *show* them the strategy? [clarifying question]

Ali: I guess I-(laughs) I probably just show them. [acquiescence affirmation]

That's why I love this. I wouldn't have thought of it that way with a strategy.
[relating-supporting affirmation]

Leslie: (laughs) I don't mean-I don't want to bring you down, but-

Ali: No, no, no. (waves hands in front of herself)

Leslie: I just hear people say that a lot-that they're teaching when they're just showing, and there is an important difference- [refutation challenge]

Fran: Exactly!

Leslie: -between the two. That is at the heart of the issue of critical thinking. There's an explicit part with the teaching of strategies and the part where students practice and learn to use those strategies and that helps to develop critical thinkers. [reimagining knowledge]

Gabe shared his concern about his own teaching with regard to critical thinking. Fran concurred, but Ali asked him to clarify the statement wanting to know more about what strategies he wanted to see more of, denoting her interest in his position on the matter. Gabe affirms his previous statements by adding a concentration on organization and planning strategies. Ali refuted and questioned the concept of explicit strategy instruction that students did not like. Leslie and Ali then had an exchange where Leslie wanted to refute Ali, but directly stated that she did not want to stop her from sharing her thoughts on the matter, "...I don't want to bring you down..." In so doing, Leslie made it clear that she wanted to keep the conversation going to which Ali agrees. With that affirmation, Leslie expounded on a reimagined binary in the teaching of critical thinking. The members of the learning community addressed each other directly. Rather than, as in earlier meetings, speaking in generalities or letting discussions die off, they talk to each other and build ideas across perspectives. There was an ebb and flow of affirmation,

challenge, and question, particularly, that kept the conversation building toward reimagining and creation of ideas. At this point, there was a sense of mutual respect when speaking. This can be noted when Ali made a point about her students not liking some strategies and Leslie refuting it; Leslie made it a point that she did not mean to bring down Ali's teaching but rather to challenge the idea. Leslie even drew on Ali's point when reimagining about critical thinking strategies. In earlier meetings, Leslie's experience sometimes created a barrier where younger teachers were put off in bring in their ideas; this was not the case here in this later meeting, a notable change of dynamic. Also, the incorporation of ideas and experience from previous speakers challenged and questioned to a point of understanding and complexity notes that the ideas built upon each other to create new perspectives and construct knowledge rather than educators simply holding ideas and sharing them at opportune intervals. These types of dependent interactions through increased instances of challenging ideas and asking questions bely the co-construction of knowledge through talk.

In the last section of this excerpt, educators continued to process the ideas about critical thinking and related it to writing instruction, the focus of the PAR PLC. As with many later discussions, educators became adept at bringing conversations to a point where much talk was coalesced into a practical stopping point.

Martin: So in writing that means, like, teaching a process? [clarifying question] (while raising his hand)

Patrick: Not *one, single* process, not in my thinking. [refutation challenge]

Angela: I agree. You can't. The needs of different types of writing are too great. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Alfred: And every student is different. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Luther: Right. So we need to be learning more about strategies that-to promote critical thinking and (looks at Leslie) *teaching* students (Leslie points in affirmation at Luther) how to use them directly. [relating-supporting affirmation] I guess-I don't know. I thought students would just get that and develop their own ways of coping with it. [refutation challenge]
But I see what we're saying. I just don't want to baby them. [acquiescence affirmation]

Cass: I don't know-this sounds more challenging. If you have them learn all these different ways, that sounds harder and more (pause) rigorous than having them do whatever, which is what I've done sometimes (shrugs shoulders apologetically). [refutation challenge]

Patrick: I hear your concern about babying, and I agree with Cass, too. I don't think being explicit is about spoon-feeding as much as it is about clarity and teaching a process. [relating-supporting affirmation]
It's like-(laughs) If I tell you to build a fire and give you instructions-Step one: put wood in a pile, Step two: light pile on fire (laughter from the group) you might have some trouble. It's the same with writing and thinking about writing. We say, "write a paper" or (looking at Ali) "write a word problem" but we don't really get into process. I think it's a problem. [reimagining knowledge] (murmurs of agreement)

Leslie: I love that analogy. [relating-supporting affirmation]

Martin: So, let's talk about some strategies. I need some ideas to think about.

This stage of the conversation involved the educators trying to create an understanding of what had been discussed. Martin's use of the "so" at the beginning of his statement implies readiness to bring the talk around to conclusions. There was still plenty of back and forth as educators challenge, question, and affirm ideas. Luther came back into the discussion after taking in other perspectives, noted by his motioning to certain people while talking, and directly acknowledged Leslie for helping him support the idea that critical thinking can be explicitly taught. Despite this, he suggested a need for more

concrete examples through his refutation. Cass seconded that before I offered up the analogy which helped to support the idea for explicit critical thinking. Despite the rigorous nature of this discussion, no explicit strategies had yet been discussed. Martin pointed that out to lead into strategy creation as a next step; my statement was really only useful insofar as it summed up the construction of knowledge through talk at the theoretical level pertaining to the idea of critical thinking. The length of this conversation alone is telling. There were new ideas being shared and reimaged while challenges and questions furthered the discussion toward reflection and the creation of ideas, both indicative of constructed knowledge. There are multiple declaratives where educators were very direct about speaking to one another and collaborating through questioning and challenging toward goals while not letting it wander. It would be difficult to look at this excerpt and try to pick out which educators had been a member of the learning community longer. Ali and Cass really reflected aloud about their practice and other educators offered relating-supporting affirmation and discussion questions as part of an action-orientation to the language. Gone was the uncertainty of early meetings despite there still being acquiescence present; the acquiescence here came after debate rather than from disengagement or uncomfortableness. The construction of knowledge around writing instruction is evident in this example, and it became more evident in later meetings as educators developed ideas through asking questions and challenging each other in order to meet the goals we set. Struggles in later meetings were more about action versus discussion than about getting people to talk and share. Everyone took part in the talk, but some people consistently reminded everyone else to strive toward goals

and not just talk for its own sake. The language of the community became a process to drive discussion toward action.

These results are indicative of change over time throughout the learning community. The PAR PLC language patterns changed. As the context itself formulated and educators negotiated roles and ways of being within it, the concept of being a part of this learning community evolved. There was not a list of what each person would and should do at each meeting nor a list of official roles; the community negotiated the nature of the group through practice and discussion. Throughout the meetings, the learning community moved from looking to one person for the answers and waiting for direction to finding answers together and creating a direction for itself. In this way, the talk of the learning community indicates a shift toward the construction of knowledge with regard to participant language practices. Earlier meetings were predominantly marked by fervent attempts by some at discussion only to find disengagement and acquiescence due to uncertainty, preconceived notions of professional learning, and unfamiliarity with challenge and questioning. As the community grew accustomed to itself and language practices throughout the modes began to take shape, co-construction of knowledge through talk became more regular with disengagement occurring only sparsely, usually due to notions of power from education experience. The language practices of the learning community eventually promoted an expectation of rigorous discourse, mostly through the joint development of ideas. Language practices that did not contribute to goals waned with familiarity and value placed on participation. When the language seemed to indicate the construction of knowledge, so too did the PAR PLC become more

collegial and oriented toward action. The action-orientation of the PAR PLC, where educators wanted to change writing instruction at the school, helped drive the language processes more toward the construction of knowledge.

Summary

The language of this learning community developed its own unique intricacies over the fourteen meetings. Educators navigated and negotiated ways of communicating that met action-oriented goals set by all members. A reciprocity developed as an expectation among learning community members; experience did not dominate the language features throughout despite early meetings. Those that shared often also tended to question in some way. Overall, the most predominant features of talk seem to show that there was a give and take with more community-based, positive-environmental features than the sort of features that might hinder productive, supportive talk toward constructing knowledge. Themes emerged from these data, a) uncertainty faded with community building, b) support came easily while challenge did not, c) questions, challenge, and action, rather than knowledge, furthered discussion, d) educators had to learn how to share, and e) educators learned the language of teacher-researchers. These themes explain in response to the research question that community language structures had to be created in order to engage in meaningful discussion and knowledge construction. while preconceived notions, uncertainty, and prior experiences with professional learning tended to contribute to the language of disengagement more than any other factor.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Introduction

This research began at the behest of educators who wanted to create a community in order to improve writing instruction, an area they identified as a need for growth. That action-oriented, community-centered approach was at the heart of this study and its participatory action research perspective. The story of this learning community would not have been the same without the focus being on the improvement of instruction that came from the teachers and not from the research itself. Participatory action research calls for research done *with* and not *on* participants (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013; McIntyre, 2008). In that vein and in order to focus on the story and the authenticity of the community, the research questions attempted to capture the language used by the participating educators as they tried to construct knowledge toward their goals. Case study methods (Stake, 1995) served to tell that story as it best met my need to take on a third-person perspective in writing this manuscript. As a participant observer researching language, my very difficult position entailed analyzing and writing about my own contributions to talk in the PAR PLC as they intermingled with the other educators. That required a mindfulness of my positionality, yet it also took a depth of analysis to acknowledge my presence. The findings of this study could not have been reached without assistance from the participating educators in the learning community. They provided insights about their talk

and rationales I could not have reached alone. While analysis toward findings employed the coding and sociocultural discourse analysis, the discussions throughout meetings with the participants and focus grouping served as an additional layer of understanding. The findings we reached could not have occurred had I not also been a participant in this learning community.

The following sections discuss the findings from the analysis which focused on the following research questions.

- How do participants use language to construct knowledge (or not) about writing instruction in a participatory action research learning community on writing?
- How does participant language use change over the course of time in this learning community about writing?

The findings came as a result of the pursuit of these questions through the analysis of language. Their discussion, likewise, is entrenched in language use. After the discussion, I include implications of these findings for teacher education, in-service teachers, and teacher research.

Discussion of Findings

Throughout the analysis process, some themes emerged which helped to underscore the ways in which the educators in this learning community used language to try to construct knowledge with one another. These are a) uncertainty faded with community building, b) support came easily while challenge did not, c) questions, challenge, and action, rather than knowledge, furthered discussion, d) educators had to

learn how to share, and e) educators learned the language of teacher-researchers. Each of these themes are discussed in the following sections.

Uncertainty Faded with Community Building

A community has to be built. This is part of the issue with typical professional development and learning communities; people who may or may not know each other are placed together just one time or irregularly and are expected to improve practice together. Results take time. In the case of this study and this learning community, there was a period of time where the participants were acclimating to one another and the meetings were less productive than they eventually came to be. A big part of this is due to uncertainty of participants about how to be within a learning community. This uncertainty was evident through certain patterns of language use. Earlier on, some participants had a lot of knowledge to share, so they did; likewise, other participants, particularly those educators with less experience, seemed less likely to share and more likely to simply agree with everything. Those indicated uncertainties. Some participants did not feel comfortable testing ideas in early meetings for several reasons, mostly amount of experience or negative experiences. Also, the constant affirmation without the development of ideas led some to seem unsure of what to say to continue discussion. As some of the more experienced teachers took charge at points, their confidence, and occasional refutation language features, seemed to dominate.

The participatory action research model of the learning community contributed to uncertainty fading over time. Participatory action research promotes community building (Chevalier & Buckles, 2013). Likewise, PLC research defends the need for community

and equitable interaction (Desimone, 2009, Timperley, 2008). As educators reminded one another about the participatory nature and non-exclusion, they held each other accountable for inclusion, as evidenced through talk. The increase in challenge and questioning particularly indicated that as it became a part of the communicative culture of the PAR PLC to trouble ideas toward improvement. Additionally, the action-orientation and sharing of practices challenged everyone to take part. That shift toward challenging and questioning ideas more comfortably served to open up the dialogue and dwindle the uncertainty about how to take part in the community. This yet again implies weaknesses in the one-time, short-lived professional development teachers are used to. In contrast, this PAR PLC framework had regularity of meetings that allowed for the creation of a process of talk which supported goal-setting and achievement. The interactions were allowed to form more naturally. As a result, uncertainty was high in the beginning stages only to assuage with practice.

Support Came Easily while Challenge Did Not

Even from the initial meeting, participants showed no signs of struggle with presenting affirmation in response to sharing of knowledge and even discussion questions. Many professional learning experiences with teachers in the U.S. have suffered from a lack of critical engagement of issues (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Timperley, 2008). The issue with this was that an overabundance of affirmation often led to a lack of development of ideas and less opportunity to use language to construct knowledge. Rather than using relating-supporting affirmation to build upon ideas, discussions ended abruptly as participants paved no way of moving forward. During the focus group Luther

shared, “You can easily become a yes man in professional development. It’s a whole lot easier to just agree with what you’re hearing and then go do your own thing than it is to listen, you know?” As with the theme of uncertainty, past experiences created an expectation with the participants of the ways in which to interact within a learning community. Just agreeing with everything seemed so much easier than challenging ideas to engage. So often in early meetings there are examples of participants shying away from sharing, refutation, discussion, and the like using affirmation as the vehicle. In this way, affirmation was sometimes counterproductive to the construction of knowledge.

Challenge seemed to teach participants how to use affirmation effectively. As the teachers discussed more topics, they began to get a sense of how to engage one another. Almost, as if at random, they would begin to directly refute each other more often. The key difference was in the structure of talk. Rather than sharing, then clarifying, then affirming, the conversations started to look more like discussion, then sharing, clarifying, discussion, followed by challenge, reimagining, and relating-supporting. A more robust structure emerged as participants began to feel more comfortable starting discussions. Rather than beginning with a new idea, the community would begin discussing an idea that had emerged before. Also, the emergence of participation in the practice of challenge was not exactly random. Different participants seemed to be drawn to certain topics. These topics became the impetus to get involved.

The PAR structure of meetings also allowed for each person to begin discussions as shared practice was necessary component; after that sort of freedom, the responsibility of challenge seemed less daunting. The struggle at first was finding ways to challenge

one another in a non-offensive way; participants at times had issue with the difference in challenging ideas versus challenging people. An example from the second meeting saw Angela tell Alfred, “You’re wrong about that.” Alfred quickly had nothing else to say other than, “Okay. Alright.” He held his hands up in acquiescence. That is starkly different than later meetings where subjects of most refutation statements were the ideas in question rather than the speakers. This form of challenge resulted in less acquiescence; rather, participants started using relating-supporting guided toward supporting their refutations and those of their colleagues. Affirmation of a refutation made the challenge more acceptable to the learning community. Thus, there was a steep learning curve for participants in navigating the language that would be most effective for both providing support and challenging one another in a way that was productive.

Questions, Challenge, and Action Rather than Knowledge, Furthered Discussion

During the focus group, Fran shared the following, “The conventional wisdom in PD is that everything has to be new. If it isn’t something new, you’ve seen it before, and it’s like, whatever.” In other words, these teachers were used to professional development being driven by a language emphasizing the sharing of knowledge, a language feature that did occur in this learning community. However, in the PAR PLC in this study, other modes of language and language features tended to drive discussion. Mercer’s exploratory talk (2000), language use that leads to knowledge construction, describes the kinds of talk that teachers in this learning community used when heading toward solving problems and refining ideas. First, questioning became a significant aspect of the language community. Whole conversations took place in the form of questions as those

questions built upon one another toward constructing knowledge. When met with a problem, members of the learning community seemed to ask questions of one another to help work through it. Questions served as the glue connecting ideas. In fact, participants started self-policing engagement in meetings using questions by asking what each person thought. This, too, furthered the conversation.

Challenge also played a role in helping discussion productivity. As previously discussed, the language of challenge was the slowest developing aspect of the learning community. As a result, it was also robust and unique to the setting. Refutations became direct and participants were expected to engage in supporting ideas. In that way, ideas became more refined, and that process became an integral part of the learning community conversations. The PAR framework of the community contributed to this. Conversation abounded with the expectation that each educator shared something in relation to writing instruction. The PAR PLC became a testing ground for ideas as all the educators began to see new ideas emerge through talk.

Lastly, action took on an overarching role as a goal of the learning community. Desimone (2009) found that learning communities tended to find more motivated participants and better student outcomes when focused on making actual changes. Especially in the last half of meetings, much of the discussion steered toward ways to implement ideas and strategies directly into the classroom. This shift from theory to practice is noticeable in the language. The outcomes of the talk often came to reflection, where teachers thought about what they had been doing in their classrooms, and the creation of ideas, where plans of implementation came to life through discussion. As

such, rather than PD as the participants had reported being used to where the presenter supplied new knowledge for receipt, the participants in this learning community used discussion to meet their community formed goals, and the primary tools of that discussion were questions, challenge, and action.

Participants Had to Learn Sharing

Sharing of knowledge was not always done effectively such that others in the group could respond. At times, language indicated that participants were not comfortable talking about their own practice, especially those teachers with less years of experience. A factor in this also seemed to be the previously discussed uncertainty participants experienced upon beginning the learning community. Just like with challenge, a language for sharing had to develop. When abruptly ended discussions developed early on from sharing, this made ideas seem closer to concrete, lacking flexibility, and beyond challenge. From Gabe during the focus group, “You come to something like this not knowing what to expect, so to put yourself out there with an idea is like exposing your weakness.” Experienced teachers were quicker in shaking off the nerves about sharing, and more swiftly adapted to a model of expressing ideas. For a few meetings, this model had the previously discussed problem of too much support with too little challenge. As a language of challenge developed, so too did more confidence about sharing. Perhaps in seeing challenge take place, comfort and support within the learning community environment developed. When asked about this development in the focus group Cass responded, “I started to see that everyone really is here to help out and come up with the best ideas for how to make writing work. You get to see no one died from being wrong

about something.” This finding compiles much of what is known about professional learning. First, it harkens to Mercer’s interthinking (1995) whereby exploratory talk developed opportunities to construct knowledge. Also, it draws upon the principals from the literature about effective professional development. Particularly, professional learning should be continuous and regular and comforting yet challenging and engaging (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009). Participant language use indicates this development of support over time in order to share knowledge toward constructing knowledge. Findings suggest that sharing in a way to receive critique was an acquired skill within the learning community.

Educators Learned the Language of Teacher-Researchers

The PAR PLC became a testing ground for ideas where the educators brought in what they were seeing in their classrooms and how they were thinking about writing to analyze and debate toward improving writing instruction. As participants shared more ideas and I brought in research-based examples and data collection strategies, language practices changed. Those descriptors that ended debate occurred with less frequency, and participants started to use the language of researchers. Terms like “multiple perspectives,” “research-based”, and “evidence” became commonplace when determining the effectiveness of ideas. In the latter half of learning community meetings, the participants implemented their own data collection regularly toward being able to share and critique which served to enforce this language. In talking about their own teacher conducted research with students, participants were flexible in explaining evidences for the findings they had. Just because they observed something did not mean

they discussed it as if it were truth; rather, they used the opportunity to discuss differences between what they and others had seen. This was an important step in the development of the participants as teacher-researchers; however, the use of vocabulary was not the sole indicator of their development in this role.

The educators in this study were teacher-researchers prior to ever beginning this learning community; discussion in the group just helped to formalized that role for many of them. As previously noted, participants tended to motion toward and look to me for direction in early meetings. As the outsider bringing in this method of learning community, other participants viewed me as the distributor of knowledge. The participatory action research nature of the learning community could not operate under that structure. I had to begin to ask questions and challenge ideas more to generate the discussions necessary to model participatory learning. The result was more comfort in having conversations over time as well as more participation. As participants learned about ways to organize data collection in their classrooms, they also incorporated language indicative of research, used more evidence to support claims, and shared more of their own practices. Through all this, participants showed more signs of self-starting rather than relying on an external source for progress. Participant language use in the last half of the meetings expressed a freedom to pursue and discuss topics of interest to each person. This aided in participant confidence and identification as teacher-researchers. During the focus group when asked about teacher research Leslie shared, “I think I just took the things I was already doing and saying and learned more about how to talk about them and better ways to do it.” This sentiment echoes the notion from the analysis of

transcripts; these teachers began to speak and feel more like researchers as they were afforded the autonomy and venue to practice it. The PAR design of the learning community with its action-orientation as well as the excitement of the teachers to try new practices contributed to that development.

Limitations

Beyond the limitations to the methodology of employed in this study which I have previously discussed, there are also limits to the application of this study's findings to practice and theory. First, my own participation as a former member of the faculty at the research site limited what I could observe had I been more of an outsider. Additionally, this study only represents a snapshot of ten educators talking about writing in this unique, alternative high school. Such specific characteristics limit the application of findings across contexts. Also, there were mostly humanities teachers in this group; how might the findings have been different if there had been more STEM educators?

The analysis pondered teacher talk around writing instruction as they constructed knowledge and how that talk changed over time; this leaves some questions yet to be answered. The findings saw that the talk did change towards more construction of knowledge, and I attributed that to the PAR framework and the sustained effort of the learning community; however, more work is needed in order to justify that in other contexts with other teachers. Would the findings be similar with a different framework given a sustained effort?

Additionally, this study did not take a critical look at all the power structures at play in teacher professional learning. I did discuss the nature of experience as a divisive

factor in community discourse; however, race, class, and gender were not the foci of this study and could provide more insight into the ways in which educators negotiate knowledge in professional learning. Even in terms of years of teaching experience as a hindrance to PLC participation, was that a function of teacher education programs or of the schools themselves? More work needs to be done to determine if either or both are a factor. These limitations offer considerations for future research. In the following sections, I offer implications for teacher education, in-service teachers and schools, and research as they pertain to the findings of this research.

Implications

This study highlights how teacher-driven professional learning can provide an opportunity for educators to address needs in an engaging way. Also, the PAR framework for professional learning communities offers a compelling insight into the ways in which teacher research enters into teacher professional learning. The analysis of teacher talk in this study and the corresponding findings resulted in perspectives both unique to this community and intriguing for future work. The next two steps from the implications of this research are 1) implementing the use of the PAR PLC framework for professional learning with other groups of educators in order to further explore its efficacy and 2) using critical data analysis tools to further understand the talk of teachers in this learning community as issues of power are concerned. As the educators in the PAR PLC grew accustomed to ways of using language to work together to get at their desires for improved writing instruction, the learning community itself took on unique characteristics. Those characteristics indicate strength of purpose and engagement by

those involved. The research suggests that this runs counter to what many teachers think of when they think of professional learning, which tends to be rather negative (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009; Desimone, 2009; Timperley, 2008). After all, many components of practice may be considered development, but the intent is what makes the act professional learning. As such, the findings of this research on the PAR PLC on writing has implications for teacher education, in-service teachers and schools, and teacher research.

Implications for Teacher Education

Newer teachers in this study seemed less prepared to take part in the learning community process initially and were slower to grow into roles for talk. This could be a function of the schools themselves. Teachers report that generally they do not feel engaged by professional learning (Timperley, 2008; TALIS, 2013). More experienced teachers, however, more quickly adapted to finding ways to construct knowledge through talk. This could suggest that teacher education programs need to do more to address the needs of professional learning once in-service because those newer teachers, who were closest to their time in teacher education, needed the most time to develop. More work needs to be done to understand where the hesitation comes from in order to help early career teachers enter into good professional learning habits. This could start with a strong partnership between schools and teacher education programs in order to work more closely with in-service teachers to understand their needs and prepare future teachers in that way. Teacher education programs could connect with schools in professional learning endeavors. A component of this research was the participating educators'

development as teacher researchers, particularly as that related to talk during professional learning. Teacher educators could create opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice the language of effective construction of knowledge within a professional learning community. It may be, as evidenced by many of the educators in this study, that an effective and engaging process of talk is not automatic when you put educators in the same room. If higher education could partner more closely with schools in professional development, then perhaps teachers could have the opportunity to develop research skills and language processes in their practice and have pre-service teachers gain experience in working with in-service teachers during professional learning.

Implications for In-Service Teachers and Schools

Discussed at length in this study, in-service teachers do not tend to like professional learning despite acknowledging that it promotes better teaching. The educators in this study showed interest in sustained involvement in this PAR PLC on writing. More work is needed with this framework in order to determine its impact on professional learning and instruction. The implications for schools from this study is the need for more professional learning that allows teachers to talk. The talk drove the construction of knowledge; as a result, teachers saw results and felt engaged. Perhaps if those kinds of opportunities were more commonplace, which research suggests they are not (Darling-Hammond, 2009; TALIS, 2013; Timperley, 2008), then teachers might not have such negative perspectives on professional learning and they might more regularly take part in PD that improves student learning.

Schools could benefit from not only creating more chances for teachers to talk with each other about practice but also partnering with and modeling for those teachers ways of talk that promote effective professional learning. In this study, a framework assisted in guiding teacher talk toward better construction of knowledge; what might schools do, if they tasked themselves with it, should they develop and employ frameworks for professional learning that focused on participatory talk toward improving instruction? Given time, the talk which leads to knowledge construction in professional learning communities might just become an enculturated part of professional practice instead some of the awkwardness noted both in this studies and others. Administrators and teachers could look more into these possibilities by exploring effective learning communities that are already taking place and borrowing strategies for encouraging talk toward improved practice. The opportunity and means to talk are not the only components implied through this research.

Educators in this study were the impetus for the formation of the group and its focus on writing instruction. This may have had a galvanizing effect on the community as there was an action-orientation that granted purpose to the meetings. Research suggests that many teachers do not see the purpose of professional learning or that it focuses too heavily upon the dissemination of policy rather than improving practice (Desimone, 2009; DuFour, 2004; Timperley, 2008). More work should be done in schools to see if more contextualized, specific, teacher-driven professional learning opportunities could increase engagement and have an impact on student learning. Schools could call policy meetings something other than professional learning in order to draw distinctions

between the purposes of meetings. In the next section, I discuss the implications for research.

Implications for Research

The notion of the participatory action research learning community as professional learning merits more exploration. The marriage of PAR and PLC in the form of participatory action research learning community makes sense in more than just placing the words beside one another; these two concepts as one complement each other and provide an opportunity for teacher professional development which is transformative, reflective, and engaging and educational research which is rich descriptively, action-oriented, and equitable. I would like to implement this framework with other learning communities in order to explore its impact of the talk and efficacy on teacher learning outcomes. A focus on participatory practices in professional learning in education could potentially increase teacher engagement as well as student outcomes of learning.

Educators in the study constructed knowledge together rather than having knowledge transmitted to them from a one-shot workshop. That is powerful and research provided insight into how they used talk to construct knowledge. More research is needed in order to understand the potential of this framework for professional learning. This model of professional learning uses humanization to bring research and criticality and collaboration to a real social context based on action, rather than a one-day inspirational speech or a policy-driven course of meetings. Future research could explore this framework across settings to better explain how it gets at the nature of how educators in professional learning use language to construct knowledge. In particular, more work is

needed to delve into the issues of power and the ways in which race, gender, and social status influence and take part in the language and interactions during teacher professional learning.

Conclusion

The educators in this PAR PLC on writing reported improved practice and engagement in the process of professional learning. The discourse analysis revealed that their talk developed into patterns which promoted the construction of knowledge. Given the time, the space, and the relative autonomy to meet, we worked together to create patterns of talk that facilitated our professional learning. The PAR PLC framework may not work for every learning community, but at the heart of it are those core tenets which promoted talk in a participatory way focused on action. That can be carried over into any teacher learning community hoping to engage in talk to construct knowledge toward improving instruction. At the time of writing this dissertation, we all still meet, now bi-weekly, to continue the work we started. We talk about how successful we feel as a community of teachers and make goals for going forward. It has been difficult to capture the effective components of this learning community; while they do echo Desimone's effective tenets of professional development (2009), there is more to it than that. I will be doing more work in the future to try to conceptualize the process more coherently. The educators at that research site say they will continue to recruit more teachers. In that way, the PAR PLC has become a sustained effort. As Angela stated in the focus group, "I always look forward to coming. It's become a part of what I do. I wouldn't do without it." We all just nodded at that.

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